The Wire 479 + 480 January + February 2024

The Wire

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The Wire 479 + 480
January + February 2024

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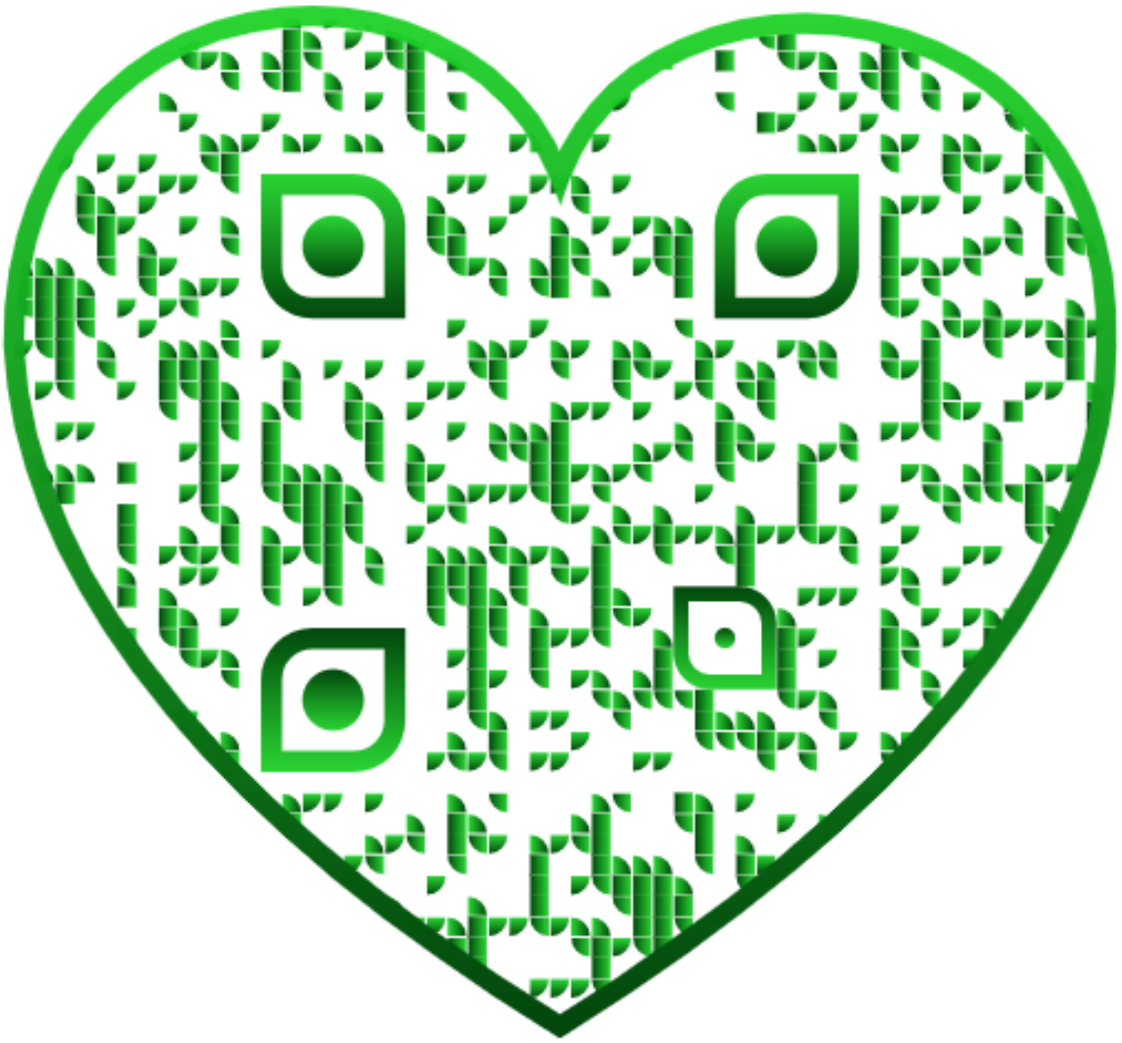

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As Seen Through Windows

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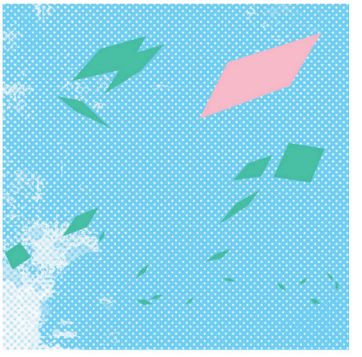

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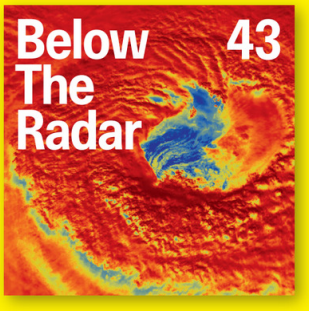

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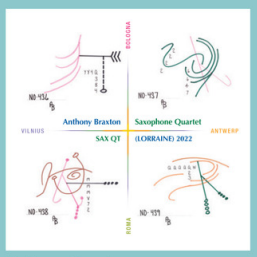

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The Masthead

Objects in the rear view mirror may be closer than they appear. Looking back, what perhaps do we remember years from now? Was music all it cracked up to be?

The Wire's top releases of the year chart, part of our annual Rewind issue, is extracted from a poll of contributors' votes, and like any list, you could say that might lower art to mere rankings, or artificially manufacture a consensus. But this kind of operation is democratic, because it takes our personal tastes out of the equation so that, however crudely, it finds a middle ground that unites our rag-tag group of listeners; one aspiration of *The Wire* is to share knowledge, to highlight artforms which show novelty and innovation, whose process of creation is inventive and authentic, and make significant difference to us as listeners and human beings.

One quality of *The Wire* that thrilled me when I first read it was the long cultural memory of the publication. Age, whether of music or the people who made it, was no barrier to appreciation. In this magazine, septuagenarian Derek Bailey stripped off for a photo shoot (*The Wire* 247); Alice Coltrane graced the cover after decades away from the music scene (*The Wire* 218). When music fills your world, as it did for me, it was exhilarating to find a mag with a historic, global, even galactic frame of reference.

Some of the best days working at *The Wire* are where an assignment or free moment sends you back to 40 years of magazines in our archive. Check the names from Rewind charts from back in the day, and you find pre-echoes of the present: artists we have followed for decades, stories we stuck with as they followed life's ups and downs, or faint musical vibrations that later started to rumble (Wolf Eyes, The Necks, Moor Mother, Broadcast, Philip Jeck). Those namechecks give you a sense of validation, a feeling that others hear something that you hear, and that as a listener your senses do not lie.

When I've had the privilege to write in the mag – trying to learn from the journalistic nous of my colleagues along the way – I've tried to do justice to musicians and readers, but also in some obscure way to the music itself. There are patterns and reiterations in history, moments of consonance or harmony in the path of music, which seem too serendipitous and significant to ignore. These connections across time and space are part of what makes *The Wire* special. If something happened once, it can happen again, like a discovery, or a revolution. And these sound patterns can be crystallised into the written word, to make something real which had previously been part of the imagination. You try and add some modest element of meaning to the music, and doing so, understand something about your experience which stands up years later.

With another Rewind issue done and dusted, I'm stepping aside as Editor of *The Wire*, stepping up to some fresh challenges, and psyched as my editorial colleagues step up to the plate and push the mag on. Hopefully you'll still find me adding words here and there; there'll always be new sounds to try and capture. Looking back, the music was everything it cracked up to be.

Derek Walmsley

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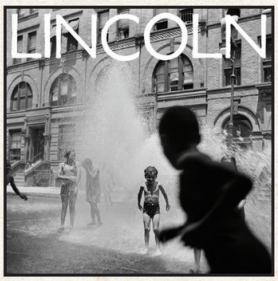

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Paul Rooney

Stephen O'Malley

Hex enduction
Thank you for commissioning the Khanate piece in *The Wire* 478. Honestly, it blows my mind that Khanate is in the magazine with such a substantial presence, much less on the cover!

Regarding the text of the piece, the highly subjective point of view of working in a band/ensemble brings various points of view and opinions to the table, with the illusion of unified presence and opinion. I can represent my own voice, and with that, some points should be clarified and corrected.

The piece states that I "spent an earlier residency at a monastery in Switzerland getting 'totally lost in my ADD', creating more than 100 charts and drawings based on hexadic data while trying (and failing) to work on a piece for symphony orchestra." I talked with the writer Rob Turner extensively about this topic. In general, I worked with the Hexadic system simply as a tool to generate some outside data to inspire different paths and habits. But I didn't follow the Hexadic system as a composition rule at all, more as a stimulus to refilter and distort my own tendencies.

The "failing" comment is out of context. The symphony orchestra piece didn't fail; it simply didn't emerge from the tool usage of the Hexadic system or the research I did at the monastery with the system. I was in a consultation/mentorship residency with Mischa Damev in 2015. The piece in question was *Une Vide Dans Le Ciel*, a composition for a large symphony orchestra that premiered in 2016, performed by Alexander Mickelthwate's Winnipeg Symphony Orchestra. I hope the opportunity arises to perform it in the future.

In this passage, the phrase "structural asymmetry" is mistakenly attributed to Scott Walker: "O'Malley tells me that during the time they spent together, the late singer shared his secret formula: 'Scott called it structural asymmetry. For him, all the sounds of a record, even down to its timbres, were serving the word.'" The phrase was mine, not Scott's.
Stephen O'Malley, Khanate, via email

Doom patrol
Just as my adoration for your magazine was beginning to wane slightly – I'm not a massive fan of the new layout, and the Don Cherry cover [*The Wire* 475] was possibly the worst ever; and I was worried you'd given up on doing your brilliant Primers, until last month's issue [Jazz & Poetry, issue 477] – you go and put KHANATE on the cover! Amazing. Khanate are creators of some of the blackest, most horrifying music I've ever had the pleasure of listening to, and Alan Dubin probably has the most tortured, shudder-inducing voice I've ever heard.
Paul Martin, Portsmouth, UK

Spectral analysis
I picked up the new issue of *The Wire* [issue 478] this week and am enjoying it as ever. A treat to have the Khanate feature (their debut album is one of my all-time favourites!). I was also happy to see my book *Gérard Grisey And Spectral Music* covered in a double review alongside Jeff Brown's biography *The Life And Music Of Gérard Grisey*. Proud to be within *The Wire*'s covers.

There's one issue with the review I wanted to mention. It's where the writer implies that my book contains no "detail (or even mention) of almost any of Grisey's major works". I appreciate the acknowledgment the review gave to some of my book's historical content, but I was a bit taken aback by this implication, as it's factually wrong, and it's misleading for anyone potentially thinking of buying the book.

My book discusses in detail several of Grisey's major works: *Dérives*, *Périodes*, *Partiels*, *Prologue* and *Modulations*. It also covers in detail several other first-period spectralist works, eg Murail's *Mémoire-erosion* and *Treize Couleurs*; Dufourt's *Saturne*; Levinas's *Appels*; Tessier's *Clair-obscur*. My book is indeed the first book in English to discuss all these works and to do so in detail alongside each other, and it's something I would like to have clarified for your readers.
Liam Cagney, via email

Mission statement
The Masthead in *The Wire* 478 contained scary, annoying and essentially crap news for artists, hobbyists and listeners. More corporate interference less free choice – although I feel confident your great publication will guide us through these murky waters. Keep on searching those dark unattended corners.
James Mee, via email

Wits end
Spenser Tomson, in a review of Position Normal's *Modern Unique* in *The Wire* 478, reckons that The Music Improvisation Company's album of the same name is a "twisted tapestry" which has been "spun from threads of traditional English jazz". I'm most grateful to him for this analysis; finally I understand why Jamie Muir sounds so much like Phil Seamen, and why it is impossible for me to tell Evan Parker from Acker Bilk.
Harry Gilonis, via email

Doubting Thomas
I thought it was nice of Richard Thomas to let Paul Rooney get a word in edgeways in his Invisible Jukebox interview [*The Wire* 476]. Don't get me wrong, it was a very entertaining read, but I'm not surprised Rooney looked a tad nonplussed in the accompanying photo.
Hugh Williams, via email

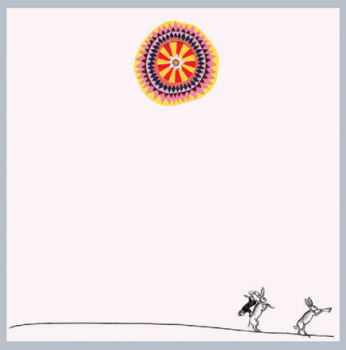
We welcome letters from readers. Write to us at letters@thewire.co.uk. Letters may be edited.

Emma Case (Rooney); Mathilde Touchard (O'Malley)

MATANA ROBERTS
Coin Coin Chapter Five: In the garden

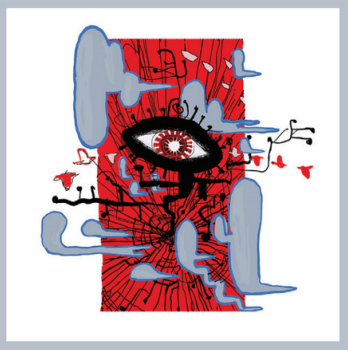
OFF WORLD
3

MARKUS FLOATS
Fourth Album



ALL HANDS_MAKE LIGHT
"Darling The Dawn"

KY
Power Is The Pharmacy



JONI VOID
Everyday Is The Song

BLACK OX ORKESTAR
Everything Returns

STEVE BATES
All The Things That Happen

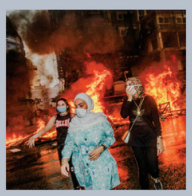
KEE AVIL
Crease

JOYFULTALK
Familiar Science

ESMERINE
Everything Was Forever Until It Was No More

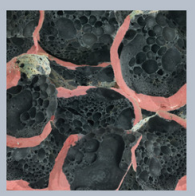
AUTOMATISME & STEFAN PAULUS
Gap/Void

T. GOWDY
Miracles



JERUSALEM IN MY HEART
Qalaq

JESSICA MOSS
Galaxy Heart



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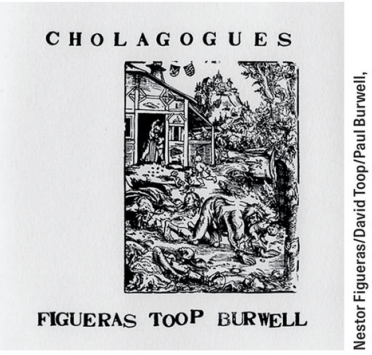
Unlimited Editions: Bead Records

The co-operative methods and ethos of the venerable improvised music label have allowed it to thrive in a brand new era

By Julian Cowley

Alex Bonney/Paul Dunmall/Mark Sanders, *The Beholder's Share* (2023)



Nestor Figueras/David Toop/Paul Burwell, *Cholagogues* (1977)

"Bead Records est 1974" declares the masthead on the label's website. Its most recent release *The Beholder's Share* (BEAD 48) features the fervent playing and lucid interaction of trumpeter Alex Bonney, saxophonist Paul Dunmall and drummer Mark Sanders. Established as an outlet for improvising musicians unwilling to compromise their creative freedom, Bead's releases have been sporadic and low profile. But a recent flurry of invigorating new albums invites reassessment of the important role it has quietly played in opening out the scope of what free improvisation may entail.

Bead's story began half a century ago, when guitarist Peter Cusack and clarinet player Simon Mayo decided to issue an LP that would preserve a taste of the music they were improvising together as A Touch Of The Sun. At that time it was a daunting prospect. Independent labels, driven by artistic integrity rather than commercial values, were rare. Cusack contacted Incus co-founder Evan Parker, who suggested seeking advice from Martin Davidson, of the fledgling Emanem label. So A Touch Of The Sun came to record and release *Milk Teeth*. They chose the name Bead simply to facilitate the administration involved in its manufacture and distribution. Due to the way it was engineered and cut, without their scrutiny, that album was not an entirely faithful representation.

Still, its initial run of 100 copies sold quickly, and a further 250 were pressed. A Touch Of The Sun then disbanded, and Mayo joined Chamberpot, alongside bassist Tony Wren, oboist Richard Beswick and violinist Philipp Wachsmann. The label started to assume a distinct identity with its second release, *Chamberpot* (1976). "Bead soon grew into a collective, where musicians were passionate about their innovations and owned their own projects," recalls Wachsmann. He has continued to play a key role, curating the label with keyboardist Matthew Hutchinson and, more recently, Norwegian drummer Emil Karlsen. Wachsmann and Karlsen have also featured on notable recordings issued during Bead's current resurgence.

During the mid-1970s a second generation emerged within British free improvised music, and early Bead releases offered fresh angles and different perspectives rather than imitative emulation of Evan Parker and Derek Bailey, AMM or Spontaneous Music Ensemble. *Cholagogues* (BEAD 6) offered an enigmatic ritual conducted by David Toop and Paul Burwell. Their instrumentation included deerbone fiddle, bamboo trumpet and bird whistles, while Venezuela's Nestor Figueras added body percussion and respiratory sounds. By contrast, Levers' *Alone* (BEAD 10) introduced the lawless energy and constructive absurdity of the trio's guitarist Hugh Metcalfe. Cusack returned with a solo album (BEAD 5), featuring guitar improvisations alongside environmental recordings. He was also part of Alterations with Toop, Steve Beresford and Terry Day. Their self-titled album joyfully explored stylistic plurality. Sleevenotes casually mention dub, reggae, Phil Spector, John Philip Sousa and Cecil Taylor.

Wachsmann values the "rich diversity and human involvement" fostered by Bead's spirit of creative independence and economic self-reliance. The younger Karlsen relishes Bead's small yet rewarding back catalogue: "It still has freshness and an uncompromising quality, which are aspirations we continue to hold central to this label's identity. The artists featured on Bead all share a commitment to pushing the boundaries of their respective creative practices. Improvised music is created in the moment. Our core idea, as a label, is to promote music from *now*, inspired and informed but not restricted by what has gone before." ● *beadrecords.com*, *beadrecords.bandcamp.com*

Unofficial Channels: Lanner Chronicle

As an adolescent in the mid-noughties, I used to spend a lot of time in a local, absurdly inconspicuous basement record shop, which had an incredible volume of *NME* and *Melody Maker* back issues. At that time, online algorithmic music recommendation already existed in its nascence. Nevertheless, I discovered a lot of gateway avant music by leafing through old newsprint from the years when the music weeklies were undergoing an identity crisis, before the latter folded and the former became the mouthpiece for a garage rock revival of which I would grow increasingly exhausted.

There is possibly no artist so far removed from the composed dishevelment – both sonically and visually – of those bands, and so consistently feted by *NME* back then, as Aphex Twin. I remember my excitement at finding two issues from 1999 and 2001 on which he was the cover star. The first featured Richard D James's head grafted onto a bikini-clad female model draped over a motorbike, and in the second photoshoot he grotesquely presses his face up against glass above a caption asking, "Do you think I'll make it into The Strokes?".

Both of these articles are among a huge and growing online archive of Aphex Twin coverage which has been transcribed and compiled by Mark Cartwright on the *Lanner Chronicle* blog, named for James's hometown in Cornwall.

When first visiting the site, I gravitated towards the earliest pieces. In an insightful interview by Simon Reynolds, we learn that James will often abandon a track because he is convinced he's stolen the melody, before realising he first 'heard' it in his own head. Other pieces are embarrassingly dated – a salacious 1993 Q&A in *Select* asks James, inter alia, if he would "shag" to his own records ("Yeah. I do. All the time"), whether he uses a condom, and how he "rates" himself sexually. I mostly find *Lanner Chronicle* fun to browse due to the historical irony of reading, for example, the casual aside in a 1992 piece that James had "just finished making an ambient album".

The project provides an invaluable resource which didn't previously exist. For such an iconic figure, book-long works on Aphex are scant. As far as I know, there are only two – a *Selected Ambient Works Vol II* study in the 33⅓ series, and a recent song guide in a more dubious looking format called *On Track*. Here's hoping that this wealth of ephemera might inspire music writers to work on further substantial efforts. ● *lannerchronicle.wordpress.com*

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2023

Phil Geraldi

Country skies are the limit for the Californian sound collagist and his "truck stop concrète"

By Emily Bick

San Diego based composer Phil Geraldi's *AM/FM USA* is the soundtrack of road trip exploration: two long collages of soaring steel guitar, interspersed with blasts of radio static and distorted blasts of country pop beaming in across miles of open landscape. Designed for cassette, its cover image is the windscreen view of a dusty, expansive horizon. It's easy to imagine the sides clicking over in a loop, accompanying an endless blissed out drive.

"I was trying to fuse country music and a meditative ambient type of music, which I also listen to really heavily in my life," says Geraldi. "I listen to a lot of ambient music in a literal sense, where I like something I can put on and not have to actively engage with it. I guess that's not really the right word because it's still engaging, but something that can be put on and can serve as background experience."

AM/FM USA is a departure from some of Geraldi's earlier projects. He's been playing in a variety of experimental noise groups since 2009, including Mystics In Bali, Shock Tropics, Soul Searching Squadron and Tabloid (archived on his YouTube channel). But his interest in audio collage was sparked a few years earlier when he was in high school in Humboldt County, Northern California. "My mom was a paralegal, and she had these early Dictaphones," he says, "She gave me one of them, I still have it actually, I don't think it's working any more. But I got into recording, and then I had another tape deck too, so I'd be bouncing back and forth to do a pseudo multitrack... I had a hand drum thing and some random stuff."

The areas around Humboldt – including Eureka and Arcata – had a busy scene of punk houses and experimental groups coming together and playing shows. "I grew up listening to punk music and being in those kind of scenes, like how a lot of people that get into experimental music are," Geraldi recalls. He was also listening to James Ferraro and his Skaters bandmate Spencer Clark, and admired their worldbuilding: "It felt like this crossroads of completely unintentional and hyper intentional. And it felt effortless in this way that made it threateningly bizarre... It was the threatening grotesqueness of the most underground punk music, but combined with this weird meditative, blissful, ambient."

From 2011–14, Geraldi and a rotating cast of other musicians lived for cheap in a farmhouse off the beaten path in Arcata, between the highway and the beach. They called it Mex N' Wow and booked shows there. "It's kind of in between Portland, Oregon and San Francisco. So a lot of the more weirdo bands, once it was on the radar, thought it was a great spot to play."

Geraldi moved around in the following years, to New York, Portland and eventually to San Diego three years ago. *AM/FM USA* had a long incubation period that began while he was in Portland. "Around 2018, I got really into country music in general, and more specifically early 1970s country rock. I grew up with that, it's my dad's favorite genre. But I never really connected with it, or thought too much about it. But something clicked in me and I started consuming that kind of music really heavily." Some favourites include Riders Of The Purple Sage, Pure Prairie League,and Gram Parsons, with the International Submarine Band and The Flying Burrito Brothers. For *AM/FM USA*, Geraldi took inspiration from Parsons's vision of "cosmic American music". "The cosmic part was more of a smearing or a blurring of a traditional type of music... in a literal sense for [Parsons's] turning more outward, specifically experimental, but more of a blurring, like bringing it into modern times. Now, it sounds very vintage because it's from the 70s, but bringing it into the modern times and mixing ingredients," he explains.

The radio adds another dimension of Cageian randomness, with its static rolls through the dial and ghostly voices beaming through the ether. "I was trying to channel when you're driving, or when you're more specifically in the passenger seat, falling asleep and you start getting that pseudo deep sleep and whatever is around, the sounds or someone talking, or in this case the radio, the way that that filters in can be really beautiful." The songs that crackle their way in and out of *AM/FM USA* are not transmissions from 70s Americana, however, but in the style of Parsons, culled from this present moment, slick hits of today. "Especially as I get older, I like playing with imagery that's very depressive with beautiful music or vice versa. The sounds in *AM/FM* are not the 70s sounds. It's the sounds of modern country, and a lot of the samples and loops and chopped up stuff is drawing from that palette of music. Even though it's fun and beautiful and pleasant, there's a nightmarish quality to it. Which I like conceptually, I like contrasting that with the over the top, zero nuanced, super sweet quality of modern US country music."

Geraldi's music is as ambivalent as it is ambient – and going back to Eno's definition of music that is as "ignorable as it is interesting", maybe this music becomes interesting when attention is paid, or listeners are receptive – and strange moods, textures and oppositions have an opportunity to emerge. "I love traditional new age music, I listen to it all the time," he says. "There's a YouTube channel, I'm not connected with this person in any way, I don't know them, but it's called *Sounds Of The Dawn*. He puts out, every single day, some weird new age cassette from the 80s or 90s or whatever. I just like the colour and flavour of it. It can function as any emotional wavelength, it's uplifting or energising or super quiet and relaxing. It's kind of frightening. It's super saccharine and happy, it's just everything. But I could probably make that argument for most music." ● *Phil Geraldi's* AM/FM USA *is released by Not Not Fun*

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HUUUM

The Vienna based trio create a riotous fusion of traditional Iranian instrumentation, electronic processing and theatrical headgear

By Ilia Rogatchevski

HUUUM: (from left) Omid Darvish, Rojin Sharafi, Alvaro Collao León

HUUUM's self-titled debut opens with the foreboding "Dibāche". The fluctuating breath that delivers a mournful saxophone melody is twinned with the crashing of synthetic waves and other digitally processed sounds. Foreshadowing the dark and mysterious themes to come, a male voice swells like the charcoal skies of an oncoming storm. "Hanābandān" kicks in with an electric scream and "Yezle" bares its teeth in a maelstrom of heightening intensity brought on by a gnashing riff and sinister violins.

An untrained ear might hear influences of free jazz, dank clubs and doom metal, but at its core the Vienna based three-piece investigate the different languages and dialects of Iran as well as the diverse music native to Persian culture. "I wanted to show the capacity of folk music in Iran," explains vocalist Omid Darvish. "When we talk about Iranian music in Europe, we think about people sitting on stage, playing this traditional instrument. You know, this stereotype."

Originally hailing from Kermanshah, Darvish was surrounded by music from an early age. He studied the tambur and Kurdish music – alongside Western classical, jazz and rock – and wanted to channel the different facets found inside Iranian folk into HUUUM.

The project, named after a mythological plant, began during Covid when Darvish took to studying music based on the sorna, an ancient double-reed instrument. The idea was to mimic its textural and melodic characteristics with the saxophone. "It was very much a learning process," remembers producer Rojin Sharafi, who also plays synths and drum machines. She gravitated to Vienna from Tehran to study music. "It was a big challenge," she continues, "not only because of the microtones, but also finding these colours and techniques."

The band, who were at that time completed by saxophonist Astrid Wiesinger, held group listening sessions that contributed to expanding the instrument's mimetic potential. After a period of covering famous folk songs from different parts of Iran, HUUUM started composing original material. While the electronics and saxophone derive their sounds from traditional forms, Darvish's singing is the authentic backbone around which everything else pivots. "Singing techniques in Iran are totally different," Darvish explains. "For example, in the West the vocal sound comes from deep inside, but when you go to the East, it comes up from behind the nose. I'm singing in maybe five or six different languages [on the album] and in each track I used the technique from [a specific] area. If you listen to "Hahre Tavil", you will hear the Tehrani accent, but how they sang in Tehran 100 years ago."

Following our interview, the band send me translated lyrics that expand on what is innately felt when listening to their songs. "Āzmān" is inspired by the music of Baluchestan and sung in Baluchi. It has a unique colour to the vocal which, Darvish says, can't be heard in music from other areas. The lyrics, initially set against a buoyant melody, describe an inner voice that strives to be recognised by its owner. Halfway through, the hopeful sax fades, only to be replaced with tectonic beats, shrill pulses and a chant that proclaims, *"Without me, death is your instant omen"*. The mood darkens on "Chapi", sung in the Lori dialect. Sharafi's machine rhythms take the helm in an ode to the funeral dancing ceremonies of Lorestan. Meanwhile, the sax shapeshifts into a shepherd's pipe playing "the melody of death" for slain youth.

HUUUM's line-up changed in the summer of 2023, when Wiesinger left due to health issues. "It was hard for us, because we three started together," Sharafi says. "We were looking for saxophonists. There are lots of great musicians in Vienna, but we wanted to have someone who, like us, comes from different practices." Álvaro Collao León, originally from Chile, is their new addition. Always interested in expanding his range, León's versatile technique combines classical, contemporary and South American influences.

Although the group haven't performed often, their stage show expands on the studio recordings. Improvisation is a key factor that involves Sharafi processing the saxophone and vocal signals live, but so is a sense of ritual. "I think an important thing for us is to interact with the audience," declares Sharafi. "Six months after HUUUM formed we played in a club. That was the best, because people were not always dancing, but listening to the music. Some friends in the audience were doing kel [ululation usually performed during communal rituals such as weddings]." This experience encouraged the band to embrace theatrical elements and fold these into their work. Each member wears their own distinctive headpiece: Sharafi's represents modern culture; Leon's – nature; Darvish's – roots. "I have very different characters in each song," says Darvish. "I'm acting, playing different people. When I wear the mask, you don't know who is behind it."

These amorphous identities are echoed in the album sleeve, a near-featureless portrait painted by Darvish's sister Hosna Darvishi. The band see themselves reflected in its reticent stranger with many stories to tell. "It's exactly like what we are doing in HUUUM," asserts Darvish. "Maybe you cannot understand anything about this music, but if you listen, you will understand that everything is natural, even the electronic beats. We didn't invent anything." Sharafi agrees: "What I like about folk music is its openness. You can change it. Having this freedom is very attractive to us." ● *HUUUM's* HUUUM *is released by Accidental Meetings*

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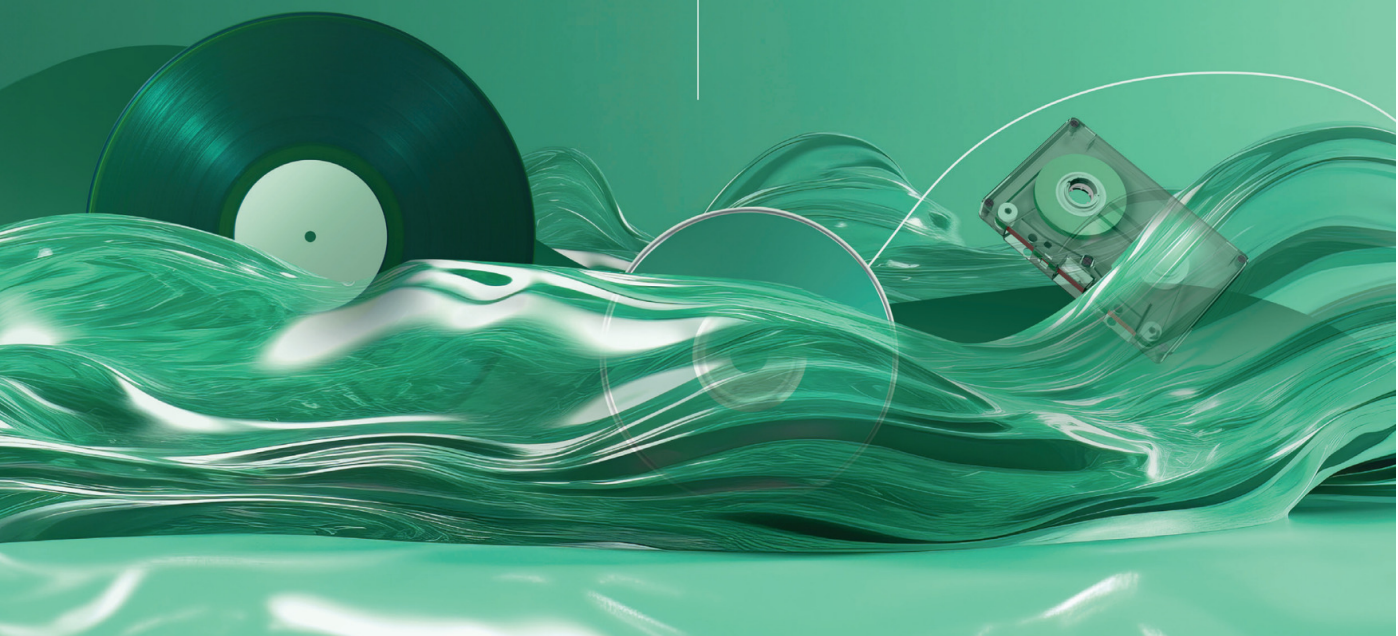

Lisa Ullén

The versatile pianist and improvisor brings her adventurous approach to a multitude of projects including solo work and the propulsive trio Space

By Peter Margasak

Märta Thisner

"All people have different personalities inside," says pianist Lisa Ullén, "so I think that can also be the case in music." When I speak with the Swedish musician over Zoom, she's gearing up for her second and third visits to Berlin over a month-long period, all with radically different projects. "It is a challenge to be distinctive in your playing, and to be clear what you want to do in each context."

But it's one that Ullén consistently takes on, bringing her ideas as an improvisor to many different projects, ranging from the slow-moving Morton Feldman-like mosaic of Finn Loxbo's Kommun to the ambient-washed, lyric improvisation of the Canadian-Swedish sextet Like The Mind. She manages to elevate all of these ensembles by remaining true to her aesthetic principles.

Born in Seoul, South Korea, she was adopted at age four by Swedish parents, who raised her in Örnsköldsvik, a tiny village in the north. Her mom and dad were not particularly interested in music, but as a kid she enthusiastically joined her church choir and when a childhood friend began studying piano, she convinced them to let her follow suit. She wasn't exposed to much music beyond the standard classical repertoire as a child, although she did convince her teacher to let her play tunes from *The Sound Of Music*.

Ullén eventually studied at the Royal College of Music in Stockholm, where she began hearing new sounds in a class with Mats Persson, encountering the music of John Cage and learning about extended techniques. Yet even after graduating in 1991 it took some years before she became a fixture on Stockholm's improvised music scene. She worked as an accompanist for singers and played classical gigs, but her interest in improvisation had been awakened by the community around the legendary venue Fylkingen and the distinctive playing of pianist Sten Sandell.

She released her first album as a leader in 2006, fronting a freely improvising quartet on Big Bang, but it wasn't until her 2011 solo LP *Catachresis* that her playing attracted attention beyond Stockholm. By then she had achieved a stunning command of prepared piano, deploying loose compositional forms and ideas to improvise over. She continues to bring her ideas to strong projects, including Anna Högberg Attack!, new music ensemble GAHLMM, a trio called Reading Music with saxophonist Johan Arrias and percussionist Henrik Olsson devoted to graphic and other unconventional scores, and Trio Generations with singer Maggie Nicols and percussionist Matilda Rolfsson. In early 2024 she will release what's arguably the best, most rigorous music of her career, with a new solo recording and the second album by the collective trio Space, featuring bassist Elsa Bergmann and drummer Anna Lund, both bandmates from Attack!

Many of Ullén's most fruitful partnerships have been with other women, including saxophonist Högberg's sextet, which has only one male musician. When she asked her to join, Ullén says, "I never thought about it as a female band. I saw it as a group of young musicians with huge potential. You have friends in every kind of generation, so it's nice to do that. We all contribute to the music and the arrangements are loose, except some melodic lines, so this is really a collective process and Anna is very good at involving everyone."

Space have worked in fits and starts since 2017, when Ullén asked Bergman and Lund to join her for a one-off evening at the Stockholm jazz club Fasching, and it's developed into a remarkable ensemble. The trio recorded their eponymous debut in January of 2021 when the pandemic had given many musicians the gift of time. "It was mostly for fun, and there wasn't so much thinking about why and how," says Ullén.

Relative Pitch released the album in 2022, and since then the trio have evolved into a ferocious working band. Their new album *Embrace The Space* captures that growth, as a more groove-oriented attack has coalesced. Lund and Bergmann straddle propulsion and colour in subtly mutating fashion, giving Ullén an expansive canvas to unleash a mixture of jagged clusters and spiky melodies, as she moves in and out of the groove like a weaver. "We have been invited to play more and more," she says, "and when we did the second recording we found it very nice to have this kind of rhythmical stuff. We didn't talk so much about it."

Ullén organised three short public sessions at Fylkingen this past June, and she enlisted festival presenter and sound artist John Chantler to record them. On each day she ran through the same three pieces. "At this point I was not sure if anything would come out of it," she recalls. Chantler was already impressed enough to release some of the recordings on the forthcoming *Heirloom*, and Ullén's restless creativity and varied preparations helped to produce wildly divergent readings of the material. She used an E-bow, generating a swarm of noise that sometimes sounds electronic, but everything heard comes from the piano, without any effects. The album cover pictures the small box of belongings that Ullén had with her when she landed in Sweden in 1968, an experience that still defines her today.

She has always operated with a sense of care and maturity, although that hasn't impeded her risk-taking nature, and as she enters her sixth decade her music has never been better, her playing never more assured. "My career has been very different from most other people," she concludes. "I started very late, and that has affected all of my choices, I think. I'm very happy to have so many chances to play. For me music is so good. It is very close to me." ● *Lisa Ullén's* Heirloom *is released by Fönstret in February.* Embrace The Space *by Space is released by Relative Pitch in March*

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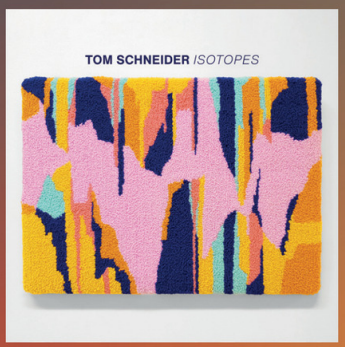

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Thomas Ignatius

The Finnish artist reimagines medieval song with synthpop Casios and some help from Google Translate

By Leah Kardos

"I just love medieval music," confesses Tuomas Palonen, artist, producer and owner of Finnish record label Palatsi. "It's such a rare thing to encounter in everyday life, like you probably wouldn't hear it in the shopping mall. I really like it when music can take you somewhere else."

Palonen's fourth record sees him adopting the persona of Thomas Ignatius, an obscure artist who produced an album of medieval synthesizer music in the mid-1980s. Adopting a fictitious historical backstory is a playful dynamic of the Palatsi label, which Palonen describes as "a kind of conceptual record label that I like to think used to exist. It used to put out records. These releases are reissues.

"With each album, I always try to think specifically of a year when it could have come out, and I try my best to make it sound and look like it could have been possible," he continues. "The first one [*Kuparilinna*, 2016] is a Beatles-esque band from the 60s, and on the solo folk album [*Tuomas Palonen*, 2018] I was thinking of 1975." Another band release from earlier this year, *Sepä Juuri*, sounds like Finnish post-punk circa 1982, and it seems that Palonen is working his way forwards through history, with the Thomas Ignatius project ostensibly drawn from the mid to late 80s. "The whole idea started from the Casio [CZ-101], I was just fooling around with it and something I played sounded really kind of medieval. Then, I needed to think of a specific year, like maybe 1987, and I was thinking of this person – my alter ego – living and working around that time, listening to a lot of medieval music as well as the current synthesizer music. I even played some Commodore 64 fantasy games to get into the mood and into this person's head. What might this person have been thinking about while making this album, having all those influences flying around?"

The music on *Thomas Ignatius* blends 80s-era synth tones (Casio CZ-101 and a Yamaha Portatone PS-6100), percussion, mandolin, zither and Palonen's clarion vocals which cascade merrily in layers of ornate melody, sung mostly in Latin. Faux-traditional tunes sound sufficiently historical, with shapely modal corners and rigid Gregorian-style parallel harmonies. The synths bring a tasty retro-futuristic incongruity that feels dream proggish and new age cosmic on tracks like "Comites Fideles" and "Quo Vado", landing atmospherically somewhere between Führs & Fröhling's *Ammerland* and Agnes Buen Garnås's *Draumkvedet*, only with added vintage PCM beats and squelchy FM bass.

With Bandcamp genre tags such as adventure synth, comfy synth and dungeon synth, and cover art featuring a synth-playing monk floating in the sky next to a medieval church, the visual impression of the album is light-hearted, yet the musical contents sound remarkably sincere. "Definitely, it's not a joke," asserts Palonen, "I did listen to a lot of medieval music when I was working on this, and I really tried to absorb that sense of melody and harmony. I did a lot of homework, and it was a long process, working on it in the extra time I had around studying and having a day job. It was this imaginary world where I could go in the evenings. It was fun."

Of the 13 tracks on *Thomas Ingatius*, 11 are original compositions. "There are two medieval cover songs, the first is track three ("Fas Et Nefas Ambulant"), which is from the *Carmina Burana* manuscript, it's an instrumental version of the song. The other one, "Stilla In Stellam Radium", is English, by an anonymous composer from the 13th century."

Palonen even went so far as to writing his own Latin lyrics, with a little help from Google Translate. "I actually studied Latin at school when I was a teenager, so I knew something, but obviously had forgotten much of it. But still, to write and sing in Latin after having studied it a little bit... I wouldn't call it a natural thing to do, but it didn't feel unnatural to do it, either."

He adds, "There's one track that has a text from the early medieval philosopher Boethius. The text is from his thesis on music. The track is also called "On Music", "De Musica" in Latin. The singing sounds like Gregorian singing, but the lyrics are actually kind of secular, talking about music. I thought that was a fun contradiction to have there."

With the last two tracks the album takes a contemplative, instrumental turn. "In Germine" gently fizzes in a buzzing drone and pillowy synth melodies that wrap around what could be a stately, new age court dance. "I'm actually playing a rice bowl in that. I played it with my fingernails, but maybe that's a disgusting detail to include?" The finale "In Flore" is a sweet, polyphonic ditty played on a slightly out of tune mandolin, to the accompaniment of happy birds. Palonen's playful, approximate approach to recreating historical forms has resulted in a suite of music that feels authentically refreshing. "I'm glad to hear it," he declares, adding, "I've been trusting my ear and listening a lot. Medieval music is like a language that's not spoken any more. The whole idea of harmony has changed so much that there's a sense of it sounding exotic to us now.

"I was thinking of the word escapism. Or maybe transportation is a better term for it ," he concludes. "As I said, I like it when music takes you places, takes you somewhere else. I would be happy if my music does that for somebody."

● *Thomas Ignatius's* Thomas Ignatius *is released by Palatsi*

Laura Salo

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Domino

As the city recovers from pandemic the Amalgam organisation has become a democratic hub for improvisation in its widest possible definition

By Levi Dayan

Outdoor performance in Chicago, 2020: (from left) Keefe Jackson, Bill Harris, Ishmael Ali

Chicago based percussionist Bill Harris has a unique relationship with improvised music. Rather than learning of the scene by going to a conservatory, or from obsessively browsing internet forums, his interest in improvising developed through the natural progression of his own musicianship. Raised in a musical family in Pittsburgh, Harris moved to Chicago in 2011 and, by his own admission, came to improvised music late. "Before I moved to Chicago I had no idea what was going on here. I knew about Chicago blues and Wilco and punk and rock music, but I didn't know about the AACM, or Umbrella Music, or Catalytic Sound until after I got here."

Improvised music is heavily community driven, and as a newcomer to the city it took Harris some time to find his foothold. However around 2015 he began to meet musicians, including saxophonist Jake Wark and pianist Matt Piet, through a number of different series at drummer Mike Reed's Constellation venue, and the three of them formed the trio Four Letter Words. Around the same time, Harris started Amalgam, a record label that soon became a central force in Chicago's improvised music scene.

Most of Amalgam's early releases featured members of Four Letter Words, but the label soon expanded to include Chicago improvisors such as Gerrit Hatcher, Ben Zucker and cellist Ishmael Ali, whom Harris met at a workshop hosted by Tony Malaby at the venerable venue Elastic Arts in 2016.

Then, of course, the pandemic hit. In Chicago, where shows practically happen everywhere and all the time, the change was a mindfuck. "You start thinking about the music you're playing, and it just seems so unimportant," says Harris. "You're just like, I play improvised music. What am I doing? But very quickly all of the musicians I knew were like, 'Hey, we need to play and get together.'" These musicians – which included clarinettist and composer Angel Bat Dawid and multi-instrumentalist Molly Jones – began putting together impromptu performances in public parks around the city, and the people of Chicago, starved for live music, took notice. As an outgrowth of these performances, Amalgam started organising shows at Chicago's Comfort Station, a small island of art and music right in the centre of bustling Milwaukee Avenue.

It was also during the pandemic that Ali, along with bassist Eli Nemay, became more involved with Amalgam, and Harris's vision of a record label that could function as a community resource became more fully realised. "I had this idea for a record label which would be this democratically voted thing," recalls Ali. "The idea was to have us present albums to each other, and if enough people liked it, then you could collectively release it."

Having amassed a significant amount of music that he was eager to release, Ali pitched the idea to Harris. "We had some late night drunk conversations and I talked about how I wanted to do this new thing, and I actually had a name for it and everything. And he was like, 'Well, why don't we do this with Amalgam?' After a few conversations, we brought Eli into the mix."

As vaccines became more readily available and the world began to open up, Amalgam emerged as something completely different from what it had been before. In 2021, Ali received a grant from New Music USA through which he organised the Chi Away project, a collection of recordings featuring contributions from artists such as turntablist Allen Moore and sound artist Norman W Long, both of whom radically expanded Amalgam's palette of sounds. The performance series at Comfort Station gave way to a monthly run at Cafe Mustache, a bar just a few miles down the road on Milwaukee Avenue.

Amalgam also further democratised itself by bringing in guest curators. "We pick five or six people whose work we really like, and they basically have total autonomy to do whatever they want," reveals Harris. Curators for this year include the aforementioned Moore, whose Hearsay trio with Ali and Harris put out the most recent release on the Amalgam label (see *The Wire* 477), as well as noted vocal improvisor Carol Genetti, saxophonist Keefe Jackson and clarinettist Emily Rach Beisel, who recently released a solo record *Particle Of Organs*.

Beisel, whose use of effects pedals gives her clarinet improvisations a distinctive doom-laden sound, views her album as reflective of Amalgam and Chicago as a whole in its approach to genre distinctions. "This past year, Amalgam released two metal albums if you count mine, which you should. I don't know that you'd find that in a lot of other labels," says Beisel. "There's certainly a lot of really amazing labels that are really dedicated just to free improvisation, or free jazz, or metal. But it's really special to have one that's pretty open, and that does reflect Chicago a lot. With my album, it's hard to quantify what it is, but it definitely belongs on Amalgam."

Musicians associated with Amalgam's various activities clearly have an interest in pushing beyond ideas of what improvised or experimental music should consist of – for example Harris and Ali also perform together in the punk/funk/hiphop/free jazz band je'raf. In the process they reveal that Amalgam envisions improvised and experimental music as not just niche categorisations which guide the consumption of a hyper-specific form of content, but rather a musical lineage which contains liberatory potential for musicians working across all kinds of genres – potential that every participating musician seeks to unlock through their own approach. ●

amalgamusic.org

Ricardo Adame

AMERICAN DREAMS RECORDS
STANDS IN SOLIDARITY WITH ALL
OPPRESSED PEOPLES.

This month's artwork selected by Vince Clarke
Photography by David Boyer. Cover design by The Human League

The Human League
Travelogue
Virgin 1980

I would have come across *Travelogue* around 1980, just before Depeche Mode kicked off. There were lots of interesting electronic, alternative bands happening at that time. We knew nothing about The Human League – the whole world was exciting and mysterious and new to us, we'd come out of the whole punk thing and suddenly there was this entirely different sound, another world. Their single "Being Boiled" had been released – a classic track that was really enjoyed among me and my friends.

This is one of the most emotive record sleeves in my collection. You can't work out what it is, but there's a seriousness to it and a real sci-fi feel. That's what would have attracted me to it at Downtown Records in Basildon back at the time it came out. Later on, I found out the cover was a photo from *National Geographic* of a trapper and dogs on Saganagons Lake in Ontario. If the track "Dreams Of Leaving" had been a single, this could have been the cover – it looks like it's depicting someone on a journey, someone trying to escape.

In terms of the style of the picture, I believe it's a very early example of something being super pixellated. Before this, I associated pixellation with someone who took a bad picture. I've been doing a lot of work with visuals recently, and I'm interested in pixellation and all the things you can do to videos to make them interesting. Any image that you use, even if it's of a smiley person, it gives it a serious edge, it twists it slightly, it makes it more emotional. You look at the picture again, and go, OK, it's something a bit weirder.

The colours on the sleeve are done in a way that makes it look more like a desert than an ice landscape. I like the idea of it being on another planet. In the early 1980s I read quite a bit of Ray Bradbury. I hated school, I hated books, and the moment I left school at 16 I stopped reading. And then I rediscovered books again when I was about 19, and science fiction was the thing I went to. I loved that 50s vibe that Bradbury had, and something about this album is reminiscent of his work, tracks like "Crow And A Baby". His work is quite nostalgic compared to modern science fiction. When he wrote about going to Venus, he assumed that people could actually go to Venus, and that it rained there. The album's images and song imagery hark back to that.

I've been preparing short films for each of the tracks on my solo album *Songs Of Silence*. The album was all done on Eurorack, and for the visuals I've been working with pixellation using synthesizer visualisers, video synth modules, etc. I've been looking at old films, YouTube, Pathé, and this really interesting library in San Francisco, the Prelinger Archives, of video, film, literature, art that's copyright free, so you can download this stuff and utilise it in your work. It includes a lot of stuff from the 50s and 60s, a lot of home movies. I've been taking the images and trying to turn them into something more than really bad films. The whole thing of processing video is what I've been working on. ● *Vince Clarke's* Songs Of Silence *is released by Mute*

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//------//

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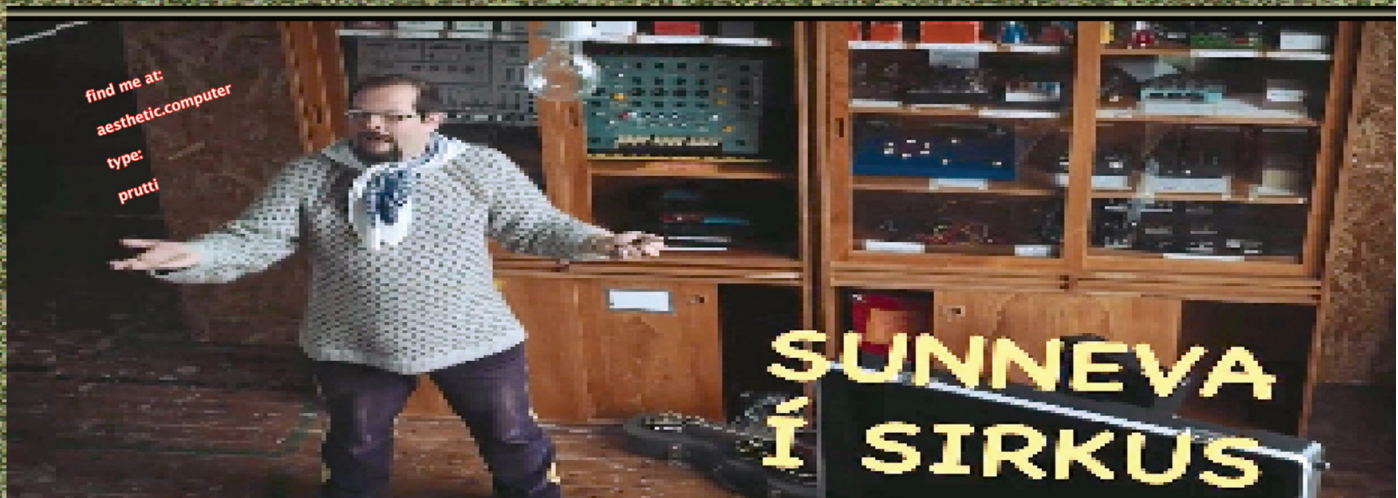

Invisible Jukebox: Linton Kwesi Johnson

Each month we play an artist or group a series of records which they are asked to comment on – with no prior knowledge of what they are about to hear

Tested by Gabriel Bristow
Photography by Kemka Ajoku

Born in the rural town of Chapelton in Jamaica in 1952, Linton Kwesi Johnson moved to Brixton, London in 1963, where he joined the British Black Panthers as a teenager. Inspired to study sociology at Goldsmiths college by WEB Du Bois's *The Souls Of Black Folk*, it was nonetheless poetry and music that became his focus. These were the tools he chose to voice the experiences of "the rebel generation", as he has called it, chronicling the social and political upheavals of the 1970s and 80s. As part of the Race Today Collective, he was instrumental in the publication of political magazine *Race Today*.

His poetry has been collected in numerous volumes and taught widely in British schools. In 2002 he became only the second living poet to be published in the Penguin Modern Classics series. Just as influential has been the way he put poetry to music, most notably on albums produced with Dennis Bovell such as *Dread Beat An' Blood* (1978), *Forces Of Victory* (1979), *Bass Culture (1980)* and *Making History* (1984). Alongside this run on Island Records, Johnson set up his own LKJ Records label, putting out the majority of his later music himself.

More than just a dub poet (he has previously stated a preference for the description of reggae poet), Johnson has made vital contributions as a music and literary critic, a political militant, and a popular educator. Many of these aspects of his work can be found in a recent collection of his prose writings, *Time Come*.

The Jukebox took place at *The Wire* office in Somerset House in Central London.

Louise Bennett-Coverley/Pupils of Calabar and Excelsior schools, Jamaica
"Colonisation In Reverse"
YouTube 2016

LKJ That's Louise Bennett, *Colonisation In Reverse*, recited by some children. It's one of the first Louise Bennett poems I ever came across in print. It was back in 1973, or thereabouts. Of course, every school child in Jamaica knows the name Miss Lou, because she was a national figure as a folklorist, actress, poet, and she used to contribute to a school magazine we had in Jamaica called *Children's Own*. But even though I'd known about Miss Lou, I'd never seen any of her poems in print until around 1973. And then it was through a book edited by one of my mentors, the late Jamaican poet-novelist-broadcaster Andrew Salkey. It was an anthology of poetry by Caribbean writers, called *Break Light*. Of course later on I found other stuff by Miss Lou. And in 1982 I made a record with her.

GB Was it a live recording?

LKJ Yes, a live recording at the Lyric Theatre in Hammersmith [issued as Louise Bennett, *Yes M'Dear – Miss Lou Live*]. She was over with her band. I think it was Peter Ashbourne's band. And she said she wanted me to do a couple of numbers with her on stage. I was in Cuba, just coming back from Havana. I landed at the airport and Chris Blackwell [of Island Records] sent a car to pick me up. Some fancy car. I went straight from the airport to the theatre. I saw Miss Lou backstage and she said, 'I want you to sing this song with me, Linton.' It's the song called "Under The Coconut Tree". And I said, mi cyan sing Miss Lou, I will speak my part. So I did a kind of cameo thing. You know, it was the man and the woman singing and talking about their love affair. And then we did a couple of word games together. "Mawnin Buddy" was one of them. But it was fun. And we became friends afterwards. I'd met her the year before when I was in Jamaica researching a ten part radio series on the history of reggae for BBC Radio 1, called *From Mento To Lovers' Rock*. I had to go and interview Miss Lou because she was so knowledgeable about Jamaica's folk culture, and the oral culture and everything. She was so nice.

GB You wrote a tribute to her that appeared in your recent book, *Time Come*.

LKJ Well, you know, Louise Bennett is the mother of Jamaican spoken word poetry, oral poetry, in the Jamaican language. She wasn't the first one to do it. At the turn of the 20th century, Claude McKay wrote the first dialect-type poems. But he wrote in a kind of strange, rural Jamaican dialect. Whereas Miss Lou's stuff was more accessible, more up to date, more topical, more... entertaining, I guess. And yes, people in Jamaica just love her.

Bessie Smith
"Backwater Blues"
From *The Essential Bessie Smith* (Columbia) 1997, rec 1927

LKJ Is it Bessie Smith?

GB Yes. Do you like it?

LKJ Yeah, I like the blues. This kind of music would have gone down well in Jamaica. My grandparents' or my parents' generation. Well, they were more into R&B. During the Second World War the Americans had bases in Jamaica, and they brought the music with them, and Jamaicans got into that kind of music. That's the roots of ska really. All the early sound system guys used to go to America and bring back records and play them on their sound systems. Sir Coxsone, Duke Reid, King Edwards, Tom The Great Sebastian, and all these people. Rhythm and blues, boogie-woogie – good dance music, you know. Not this.

GB This is the older stuff, classic blues.

LKJ Yeah, this is older stuff. In Jamaica, the early versions were really an imitation. Because after the supply dried up because the music had changed to rock 'n' roll in America, they couldn't get those records any more, so Jamaican musicians would record them. And gradually, aspects of the Jamaican folk culture began to creep into the music, until it became identifiably Jamaican. That was the birth of ska, the emphasis on the after beat, that *un-ka-un-ka*. And then out of that came rocksteady and reggae.

GB What about this song's social lyricism? I know that's a turn of phrase you've used in one of your essays. "Backwater Blues" is about a 1926 flood in Nashville, Tennessee.

LKJ Well, some of these blues tunes tell stories. I wouldn't call myself an expert on blues music. My favourite was T-Bone Walker. He has a distinctive guitar sound. And that guy's got a great sense of humour. There's one of his tunes, he says, *"I had to go to court this morning/And the judge broke down and cried/ He said, 'Son, I'm gonna have to send you to jail'"*, or whatever, I can't remember the exact lyrics. But the judge breaking down and crying because he felt so sorry for this person!

GB There wasn't much humour in that Bessie Smith song, but I wanted to play it to you because of the social reportage you get in blues, which I hear in your own work.

The Mighty Terror
"The Hydrogen Bomb"
From *London Is The Place For Me 7* (Honest Jon's Records) 2019, rec 1954

LKJ When I hear this, it sounds like what they call kaiso, which later became known as calypso, which evolved into soca. The thing that the calypso, the kaiso – and its equivalent in Jamaica, the mento – had in common, was their topicality in the lyricism, the social commentary. And often done with a lot of wit. And that's a thing that you'll find throughout Caribbean music. Oftentimes it's the only voice that ordinary people have for commenting on the human condition.

GB It's The Mighty Terror on the Honest Jon's compilation series *London Is The Place For Me*. I chose this one again because of the social commentary aspect. It came out in 1954 on Melodisc.

Linton Kwesi Johnson outside 198 Contemporary Arts and Learning, South London, November 2023

LKJ Oh, Melodisc! Melodisc was a label in this country, set up by a Jewish guy, I forget his name [Emil E Shalit]. Prince Buster had a lot of records out on Melodisc. And then he had a label called Blue Beat. Hence we used to call the early Jamaican R&B tunes blue beat, because that was the name of the label. It's like lovers rock – that's where the term comes from, the actual label was called Lover's Rock. Romantic Black British reggae.

There's some great calypsonians. The Mighty Sparrow. God. He was not only a great performer, he wrote great lyrics. I saw him once at The Sounds Of Brazil in New York, a club which I played a few times myself. It was great.

GB **Was that in his soca era? In the 1980s?**

LKJ Yes, definitely.

GB **Did you listen to calypso or kaiso growing up?**

LKJ Not a lot of it, no. Mostly reggae. And we had the equivalent in Jamaica, the mento.

GB **Did your feelings for mento change from when you were in your twenties to now? Do you have a different feeling for it?**

LKJ No, no. It's part of our roots, part of our tradition. A lot of Jamaican artists called themselves calypsonians, because calypso was globally known, whereas mento, it was, 'what's this mento business?' kind of thing. People wouldn't know what mento is. They are a very similar form. All of these Caribbean folk musics, they all have the same emphasis on the after beat. The beat in between the beat. And the style of the music would largely be determined by the percussion, the bongo drums or whatever. Merengue and all these.

Dennis Bovell
"The Grunwick Affair"
From *Decibel* (Pressure Sounds) 2003, rec 1977

LKJ That's the unmistakable sound of Dennis Bovell.

GB **What is it that makes it unmistakable?**

LKJ I don't know, it's just his sound. The drumming pattern sounds to me like the style of the late Angus Gaye [aka Drummie Zeb] from Aswad. I don't know if it's him, but I know they did some work together.

GB **I know who's on the horns: Michael 'Bami' Rose on saxophone, Eddie Thornton on trumpet, and Rico Rodriguez on trombone.**

LKJ All three of them from Alpha. Actually I don't know about Bami. But Rico and Tan Tan – Eddie Thornton, we call Tan Tan – they went to Alpha [Boys School in Jamaica], which was like a reformatory for wayward or abandoned children, juvenile delinquents. And in Jamaica it was one of the few places – apart from the police band, the military band – where you could learn to play music. Alpha had a reputation for producing great musicians. Most of the best musicians in Jamaica from that era came out of Alpha.

GB **There was a Tan Tan record in my house growing up. I remember the cover: a white and green background with his face on it.**

LKJ Tan Tan, he always called me Clinton [laughs]. Known him for years. He's done some tunes for me as well. I think he's in a care home at the moment. The last time I saw him I was in a betting shop in Brixton and he came in. He used to come to Brixton every so often to buy loads of fish to throw in his freezer. And he said to me, 'Cl-cl-cl-Clinton! Mi pay down pon my spot yuh nuh'. I said, pay down pon what spot? 'The graveyard! The graveyard a-full up! Quick quick quick! So mi find mi spot' [laughs]. According to Rico, Tan Tan was Sister Ignatius's favourite. This was one of the nuns at Alpha – she was a phenomenal woman. I think there's a book out on her. Short little woman. She was in charge of all these guys, she nurtured them. Tiny little woman. I think she was a boxer as well. She's legendary amongst that generation of Jamaican musicians who went to Alpha.

GB **This track is called "The Grunwick Affair". Does that ring any bells?**

LKJ The Grunwick strike [at Grunwick Film Processing Laboratories in Dollis Hill, North West London; it lasted from 1976–78]. I think we covered that in *Race Today*. Some Asian women were involved in that?

GB **Yes. Did you go to the picket lines yourself?**

LKJ Me personally, no. But *Race Today* was involved in that. We were supporting them. I was a member of the Race Today Collective at the time, led by Darcus Howe, who was the editor of the magazine.

GB **Bovell wasn't in the Collective?**

LKJ No, Dennis wasn't political at all.

GB **Did you give him the track title? Or was the Grunwick strike on TV every night?**

LKJ Well, it must have been there in his consciousness. And he probably would have identified with the strikers himself. He's that kind of guy, but he's not a political activist type of person. He did stuff for Rock Against Racism. During the New Cross fire fundraising he got his band Matumbi involved, back in the day.

Ornette Coleman
"Embraceable You"
From *This Is Our Music* (Atlantic) 1961

LKJ I feel as if I should know who this is, but I don't. I can't think. Who is it?

GB **It's Ornette Coleman.**

LKJ Oh, Ornette! I met him.

GB **Here playing with another person you've met: Don Cherry.**

LKJ Don, yeah. He came on stage and did a number with us. He was all over the place with his little pocket trumpet – I forgot what they call it – his little penny trumpet or whatever.

The thing about Ornette Coleman. When you hear this thing about free form jazz, it's not what you envisage, because the music's actually very structured. And you would have thought it would have been more avant garde – you know people riffing up and down the scales or whatever. But it's very structured. I didn't understand it, but I found it interesting. I think it was more to do with harmonics than anything else.

GB **Tell me about the time you met Ornette.**

LKJ Where did I meet Ornette Coleman? Or do I *think* I met him? I think I might have met him briefly in London when he did a gig at the Queen Elizabeth Hall. We used to play this club in San Francisco, whenever we toured America. And the guy who ran the club was his manager at the time. And of course I met Denardo, his son, some years later, and Jayne Cortez, his ex-wife, and we became very good friends.

GB **I picked "Embraceable You" because I know you love Charlie Parker's version.**

LKJ I didn't recognise it at all man. You got me there.

GB **I listened to your *Desert Island Discs* on the BBC so I knew it was one of your favourites.**

LKJ I mean his version of "Embraceable You" pales in comparison to Charlie Parker's version. Come on! There's no comparison.

The Advanced Workers With The Anti-Imperialist Singers
"You Was Dancin Need To Be Marchin So You Can Dance Some More Later On"
From *You Was Dancin Need To Be Marchin So You Can Dance Some More Later On/Better Red Let Others Be Dead* (People's War) 1976

LKJ Turn it down a bit please... I don't know this, and it's not my cup of tea either. Is it 1970s funk? With the wah-wah guitars and all that.

GB **The reason I chose it might become clear if we wait another minute.**

LKJ OK. *"Marching in the street"*, is that what they're saying? Sounds a bit like the kind of stuff that Amiri Baraka would do back in the day.

GB **That's it. You got it.**

LKJ Black Arts Movement and all that sort of stuff. We became good friends, Amiri and I. I met him in Italy somewhere, we were doing something – some bunch of anarchists brought us over there to do some stuff.

GB **In the 1970s?**

LKJ Yeah. We met again in Amsterdam in the early 80s. There was this guy called Benn Posset based in Amsterdam, who used to have a poetry organisation called One World Poetry. And he was into the Beats, the American Beats. So it was Ginsberg, Lawrence Ferlinghetti, John Giorno, Amiri Baraka... Who's the guy who wrote *Naked Lunch*?

GB **William Burroughs.**

LKJ William Burroughs. I would be reading with these guys. I found some of their stuff kind of weird. Avant garde kind of stuff. Way out, man.

GB **What about Baraka? What was his stuff like at that time?**

LKJ One time, me and The Dennis Bovell Dub Band, we were doing a gig in Italy somewhere. We didn't know that Amiri Baraka was on the bill with us. And he said, 'Hey Linton, what's happening man? You guys playing some nice reggae stuff.' So he said to Dennis and the other musicians, 'Hey, you guys, do you know "A Night In Tunisia"?' They said, yeah. And he said, 'Right, you guys are gonna back me, I want that tune.' And they started playing – *badabada-daaa-dada-dada* – and he started reciting a poem to that track.

GB **If only that had been recorded!**

LKJ Yeah. It was some little village, some little back bush somewhere in Italy. The food was good, the wine was brilliant.

GB **What about the anarchists who brought you over when you first met Baraka? Was that during the student-worker movement in 1977? When the so-called Autonomist movement was in full flow?**

LKJ Yeah, there was all kinds of things going on in Italy. Terrorism and all these extreme left wing groups blowing up places and all this kind of stuff. I think these guys were like that, these anarchist guys that brought us over.

GB **You don't remember any names?**

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OTHER MINDS records

othermindsrecords.bandcamp.com
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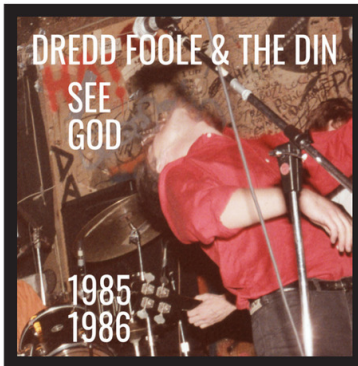
A set of improvisations recorded during the COVID pandemic, this LP features the trio of Thollem (voice and wavestate synthesizer), Terry Riley (voice), and Nels Cline (electric guitars, effects, and megamouth).



Dredd Foole & the Din
See God (1985–1986)
CvsDCD099

The complete Volcano Suns-era Din, with both LPs reissued for the first time plus a trove of unreleased material, all re/mastered from their original tapes.

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Four Spheres
CvsDCD102

Bold new music for quartet, exploring flow and cessation. Led by bassist Jason Roebke, and featuring legendary reedman Edward Wilkerson Jr., pianist Mabel Kwan, and drummer Marcus Evans.

Rob Mazurek Exploding Star Orchestra/Small Unit
Spectral Fiction
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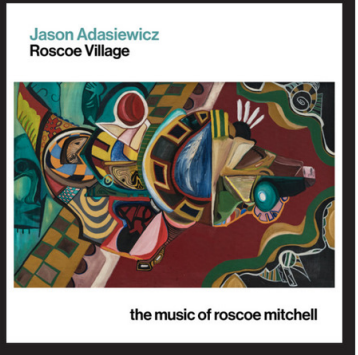
Jason Adasiewicz
Roscoe Village
CvsDCD103

Newly transcribed and arranged Roscoe Mitchell pieces reimagined for solo vibraphone by one of the most in-demand players on improvised music stages.



Fred Anderson Quartet
The Milwaukee Tapes Vol. 2
CvsDCD101

Chicago legend, Anderson, with a band including trumpeter Billy Brimfield and drummer Hamid Drake, live in 1980. Long awaited and never before released.

CORBETT vs. DEMPSEY

LKJ No. We did a radio interview together, me and Amiri Baraka.

GB **Was it on Radio Alice, by any chance?**

LKJ I can't remember.

GB **One last question on this track: what do you think about this agitprop type song?**

LKJ Yeah, you know, it's what it was. Some things needed to be said. You're mobilising your forces to go and do battle, so that has its place. I mean a couple of my things could be called agitprop, I guess. But to go back to that bunch of guys, the Beats and them, the nicest one of them was Lawrence Ferlinghetti. He had a publishing company that put out poetry, based in San Francisco. And they'd met Mikey Smith, through Édouard Glissant, the Martinican man of letters. I was supposed to go and do something with them for Édouard, but I couldn't because I was in Jamaica researching for the *From Mento To Lovers Rock* series. So I suggested Mikey Smith, the Jamaican poet. And they all got on very well. He met Jayne Cortez there. And when he died, Lawrence put out his collection of poems. City Lights: that's the name of the publisher.

Dizzee Rascal
"Sittin' Here"
From *Boy In Da Corner* (XL Recordings) 2003

LKJ I don't know who that is. Dizzee Rascal?

GB **You got it.**

LKJ I must confess I don't understand half of what they say on these grime records. Some of it is so minimalistic you can't even dance to it. But grime makes me think about that journey from reggae, from dub music, the drum and bass and the spoken word together. It is coming out of that tradition. And it's a platform for the youth to express themselves. Just like back in my day guys used to get hold of the microphone and chat over a dub track at some sound system dance. The other thing when I think about grime is, I'm thinking how infectious Afrobeats has become in Jamaica. It's big in Jamaica. And that's because so much of the dancehall music made in Jamaica is a load of fucking rubbish, really. Some of the tracks you can't even dance to them. At least with Afrobeats you can dance to it. And young people when they go out to have a good time they wanna hear music that they can move to. And also, it makes me think that second and third generation African young people are making such a big impact on the general cultural scene in England. Not only in music, but in art, in theatre, in film. Some of the big names in film are guys who are second generation Africans. The 1970s and 80s was Caribbean culture. The 21st century now it's African – second and third generation Africans.

GB **Were you interested in Dizzee Rascal when he first got big?**

LKJ Yeah, I liked him. He had style. I liked the vibes about him. Or that tune "Bonkers". I really like that tune. *"Some people think I'm bonkers"*.

GB **He's got that Cockney side.**

LKJ Yeah, they're Black British. It's a Black British voice, a Black British sound. It's not like the reggae we had coming from Jamaica to England. This is Black British music. Even though it might have Caribbean roots coming back from dub, drum 'n' bass, to jungle.

GB **He was a drum 'n' bass DJ before he was a grime rapper.**

LKJ Really?

GB **He came up on the pirate radio stations around 2000.**

LKJ Well a lot of them did, didn't they?

Count Ossie & The Mystical Revelation Of Rastafari
"Poem (I)"
From *Grounation* (Soul Jazz) 2022, rec 1973

LKJ Count Ossie & The Mystical Revelation Of Rastafari. From *Grounation*.

GB **That didn't take you long.**

LKJ This album changed my life. Blew my mind. I wanted to become a Rasta after I finished listening to this record. I was a youngster. What's this guy's name? *"Life like good music, never dies"*. I know this guy. He died. There are about three poets on this album. *"Shouldn't that respect be paid to the living instead"*. Joseph Ruglass. Joe Ruglass. That's his name. It come back to me. Yeah man, I was listening to this back in my early twenties. I've still got the record indoors.

GB **It's very beautiful. What was it about it that moved you?**

LKJ Well, it was Rastafari expounding Rastafarian anti-colonial sentiments. The drumming. The spirituality of it, without it being religious. I just loved everything about it. The lyrics. This whole idea of embracing your African roots and your African heritage. It was very important, especially in a society where after 300 odd years of colonial brainwashing you were meant to feel inferior to white people. Count Ossie & The Mystical Revelation Of Rastafari – they were the antidote to that. They was also expressing anti-colonial sentiments that I could identify with.

GB **How did it first get into your hands?**

LKJ I heard about it. I can't remember if I actually went to a shop called Bamboo on Stroud Green Road in Finsbury Park [in North London] and bought it. The label was called Bamboo too. It was run by this Jamaican guy, I forget his name. It was either that or I bought it in Brixton. But it wasn't the kind of record that everybody... you'd have to go and ask for it, or order it. It's a three album set.

GB **It was reissued last year on its 50th anniversary by Soul Jazz Records.**

LKJ Oh really? It had a huge impact on me.

GB **I know you've talked about how once, when Bob Marley read your poems, he said something like, 'Why aren't you talking about Jah?' Was there a tension between spirituality and politics for you?**

LKJ Not really. I found a lot of the spiritual stuff quite moving actually, because I was brought up on singing spirituals, church songs and hymns and all of that. Some of them were very beautiful. I wasn't a religious person, but I could identify with the sentiments of the songs.

Jayne Cortez
"I Am New York City"
From *Celebrations And Solitudes* (Strata-East) 1974

LKJ I know that bassline... ah, it's Jayne Cortez. Great poet. She has a unique voice in African-American poetry. I think she's playing with this guy Davis, who died recently.

GB **Richard Davis on bass.**

LKJ She's something else. She's such a nice woman. And her husband Melvin Edwards – really great, one of the world's most renowned sculptors. I remember she performed at the International Book Fair of Radical Black and Third World Books in 1985. And she just kept on coming back every year, or every other year after that. She gave a keynote address at one of the book fair openings. She was something else. The way she used her voice... I think she'd learnt some of the techniques of musicians, about intonation, pitch, inflection. She goes high, then she goes low. And she always sounded so *cool*. And her poetry is often very combative. Yeah, fine poet, fine poet. We shared a stage a few times. I remember back in 1993 or something, I was asked to curate an evening of poetry – choose who I like – at the Queen Elizabeth Hall. So I invited Amiri, I had to invite his wife as well because he didn't go anywhere without her.

Jayne Cortez

GB **Amina.**

LKJ Amina, and Jayne Cortez, Kendel Hippolyte from St Lucia, and Lesego Rampolokeng from South Africa, who was like a South African dub poet. The audience they just loved her. We had a lot of good times together. There was a guy called Jean-Jacques Lebel who was an anarchist painter-poet, I think his father was some famous collector or something. He had this organisation called Polyphonix and they would put on these avant garde-type literary events. And me and Jayne did a couple of them. I'd meet up with Jayne not only in those places but here in London and New York. When I was artist-in-residence at NYU I saw her all the time because they just lived nearby. She took me out one evening to hear Ravi Coltrane, John Coltrane's son, with one of the great drummers. I can't remember which drummer it was, maybe Art Blakey... or [Elvin] Jones...

GB **Philly Joe Jones?**

LKJ Not Philly Joe Jones.

GB **It might have been a bit late for him.**

LKJ Philly Joe Jones, I love. He used to play with Miles Davis.

GB **He used to do that famous rim shot that Miles was always looking for.**

LKJ Yeah.

GB **Well, thank you very much.**

LKJ My pleasure. ●

Val Wilmer

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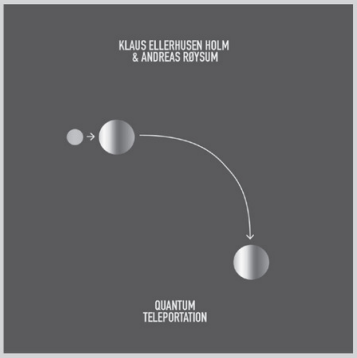

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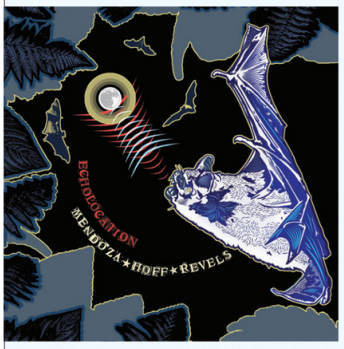

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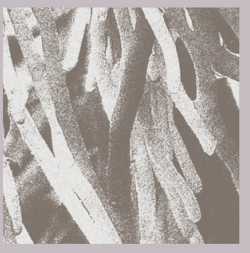

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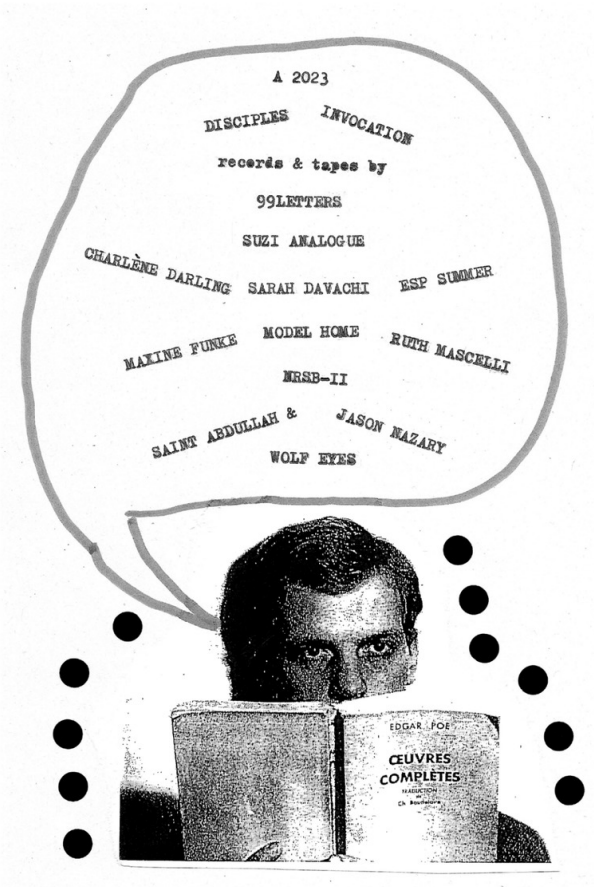

Laetitia Sadier in London, November 2023

Fight the Power

Laetitia Sadier

The new solo music of the Stereolab founder invokes self-love and collective healing as bulwarks against the dark forces of capitalist ideology

By Claire Biddles
Photography by Karina Barberis

"I don't intentionally make music that is good for the nervous system," confesses Laetitia Sadier with a wry smile. "But people have told me that they find my music quite healing." While the biting lyricism of her group Stereolab may have provided listeners with healing through bitter catharsis, the French musician's fifth solo album *Rooting For Love* is a direct call to heal personal wounds in the service of societal transformation, delivered via a wide-eyed, exploratory take on her trademark art pop style.

"If I had to sum them up, I would say they're about healing our personal and collective traumas," Sadier continues, addressing the ten songs on the album. "Loving oneself, it's not a selfish thing, it's a needed thing. The ego is a very fierce thing that can have such a strong grip on us, and it has been so exploited by the capitalist ideology. Our egos thrive on drama, pain and suffering, but I know that there's more to us than just our demons and our monsters. We can shift; we have a choice."

Transformative moments are all over the record, in the rich imagery of "La Nageuse Nue" (*"Metals that must undergo/ Extreme temperatures/Yielding the finer fruits of the self"*) and "Who + What" (*"The walls are falling down/Cultures are communing... on the verge of becoming citizens in a universe"*) which sees a chorus in upward climb, lingering at the cusp of release. *Rooting For Love*'s mood is one of discovery and near-psychedelic revelation – encapsulated in the moment midway through "Protéïformunité" when the measured pace of voices and guitar quickens into a kaleidoscope of swirling percussion.

The album's release has been a long time coming, with the first single "New Moon" dating back to 2021. "I started the work in 2019, or 2018," Sadier explains from the London home where much of it was written and recorded. "There's been a lot of things that came in the way to it being made, and to it being released – I had a knee operation, then Stereolab reunited, then I had long Covid. But I've learned that when things happen, they happen for a reason, not to panic or be pissed off that it's not immediate, it's OK if things take a while."

The album emerged in small in-between moments, with Sadier embracing serendipity and chance. She wrote the spacious, exploratory twin songs "Panser L'Inacceptable" and "La Nageuse Nue" when her internet was down during lockdown. "I took my guitar, and these really cool chords just came out of I don't know where!" she laughs. "So again, it's like, don't be pissed off that you can't watch your episode of *Killing Eve*, it's because you needed to write that song! The album was kind of interstitially made, but to me, these are the best moments, when you're not due to be doing anything important. That's where, for me, the important things happen."

The idea of collectivity has long been inherent in Sadier's work, whether in the Marxist lyrical ideas she brought to Stereolab, or in her tendency to work in the context of a group. As well as Stereolab – who reunited in 2019 and curated the 2023 edition of Utrecht's Le Guess Who? festival – Sadier works with her own band Laetitia Sadier Source Ensemble, and earlier this year she collaborated with her friends in the Brazilian group Mombojó on the album *What Will You Grow Now?*, released under the Modern Cosmology moniker.

"I work with people who I share a vision with," explains Sadier. Indeed, she produced *Rooting For Love* alongside two longtime collaborators, Source Ensemble's Emmanuel Mario and *What Will You Grow Now?* producer Hannes Plattmeier, who recorded the majority of the album with Sadier in her home studio. "We did three day spurts of work, and he would bring all these really crazy microphones and gear that he's got. He's a fantastic collaborator, he's technically amazing and also very supportive. I'm not always a super confident player, and he always reassured me."

Other players included bassist Xavi Muñoz, who tours with Stereolab, and drummer Lucie Antunes. "She's actually a high end percussionist, for contemporary music pieces where she

touches everything with white gloves," Sadier laughs. "But she wants to bridge the world of very academic music, people who practice eight hours a day, and the world of pop." This mix is key to tracks like "Un Autre Attente", where Antunes signals switches between propulsive pop verses and an angular pseudo chorus.

Another key collaborator is Aksak Maboul singer Veronique Vincent, who wrote the lyrics for "Don't Forget You're Mine", a disturbing vignette of domestic violence. "For me, lyrics are the hardest thing to come up with, so I was delighted," comments Sadier about the collaboration. "I gave her the melody and she had a lot of fun. She loves to play with words, so for her it was just a game." The song is sung from the perspective of an abuser punishing their partner after a show of professional success (*"Hey don't scream with rage it's vain I'm not impressed just exasperated again/A good slap is what you need a good slap is what you want take that take that"*). The hidden in plain sight darkness of the lyrics, sung over a louche yé-yé beat, mirrors the insidiousness of abuse. "Of course it's also an opportunity to place a message about a dark subject. A lot of the darkness is coming to light presently and I think it's part of that phenomenon."

Because of the budgetary issues that many international touring musicians now experience, Sadier is not able to take her ensemble along for her forthcoming American tour in the spring, meaning she must adapt to an unusually solitary set-up. "I'm having now to develop the material solo, so I bought a sampler. That's keeping me busy, actually, because I've never used one before, it's a very cool and super creative instrument. You could do a whole concert just on the sampler with the effects, it's really fun. I mean, I will still use a guitar, but the sampler is one way of being creative so that the show is not the same every night. Some artists are about precision, every night is the same setlist, everyone's on in-ears. For me, that gives me anxiety! I'm more of a punk in that respect."

"The political elites are showing how corrupt they are. They don't work for democracy. They don't give a shit about people. All they want is the privileges that come with being in power."

Whether singing in close wordless harmony on "The Dash", or in the vocal cacophony of "Who + What", Sadier's recognisable voice is often in tandem with others on *Rooting For Love*. These bolstering voices are "The Choir", a number of singers who overlap with the line-up of The Source Ensemble. Sadier enjoys singing in a group, but her choir also has philosophical significance. "I'm very attracted to Pauline Oliveros's idea of deep listening, because when you do deep listening, you kind of transcend your body and you become at one," she says. "An idea that is very dear to me is that we're not separated. The capitalist ideology is really like, I am absolutely distinct from you and you and you. And it is true that we are individuals – we are different, but we are not separated. We are part of one big living organism. What's projected out there in the world is a super warped notion that we bear no relation."

Sadier cites Oliveros's *Tuning Meditation*, a group exercise where each participant sings a tone, then is invited to tune in with the tone of other voices in the field of sound, repeated until the group comes to a natural, collective conclusion. "We will tend to harmonise because we need to, there is this kind of auto-organisation that goes on," Sadier says of what the work reveals. "It's a natural thing to us, we have to trust that it's there. Social media trying to put people at each other's throats, yes, we can be like that – but we can also exist on a higher frequency. We've done the lower shit, how about now we explore the higher realms of what it is to be human, what it is to be alive, what it is to be a living organism, and all these amazing capacities that we have?"

In order to reach these higher realms, Sadier uses the album to advocate for preparatory inner healing, reflecting her interest in Carl Jung's concept of shadow work: excavating the parts of ourselves that we ordinarily keep hidden. "I think [the songs] are about taking a journey inward, looking into the darkness with a big torch and bringing love and compassion to our wounds," she explains. "We have ancestral trauma that we carry within us, and that forms patterns of behaviour that we repeat, because the healing hasn't happened. Jung spoke of the shadow, and how it is not something that we should fear or want to sweep under the carpet, it's something that we should go towards and embrace. Because there's actually a lot of creativity there, it's a rich soil.

"If you deny it the light and deny it the love, it will bite and it is biting," Sadier continues. "Look at the state of the world: it's all shadow shit that we've not looked at and the results are devastating. And of course, as most of us are getting poorer and more desperate, some minority is getting extremely rich, but what's your fucking billions in the bank gonna get you when there's no trees on the planet, when the oxygen is so polluted? What then? We're really at a critical point in time and space, where we're going to have to look much more deeply into ourselves and do the work."

For Sadier, individual transformation must lead to collective transformation, an essential revolutionary change in our unlivable present. "When most of us have done the work, I think it will be much calmer," she insists. "Indeed, maybe we need a certain percentage of us to for the shift to really happen. All these catastrophes that are happening, they make people question more deeply: is this what we want? Do I have a choice in this? I see that more and more people don't want that narrative, the war narrative. When it comes to climate change, is it too late? Can we limit it? If we can, then let's do it, but there's no political will. So we need to be much more implied, in our lives, in our communities, and maybe beyond. The political elites are showing how corrupt they are. They don't work for democracy. They don't work for people. They don't give a shit about people. All they want is the privileges that come with being in power. It's clear that they're dangerous."

Sadier acknowledges a cultural shift towards the kind of politically engaged work she's been making since the formation of Stereolab in 1990. "For me, it's not a new thing, and I did feel quite alone ten or 20 years ago," she says, "but now the matter is extremely pressing and we need to look at ourselves as empowered beings, to step up into our power and our responsibilities and stop fucking around, stop being scared to make a difference. I think at some point, this simply will not be a choice that we'll have. Because it's going to be a matter of possibly life or death. I think humanity will survive. Maybe a lot of us are going to be crushed in the process of the change. But what is clear today is that we can't take our old patterns, which serve nobody, into the next step of humanity's evolution."

After Stereolab went on extended hiatus in 2009, Sadier trained in shiatsu therapy, a form of Japanese bodywork incorporating massage, acupressure and assisted stretching. Although ostensibly very different, her songwriting and shiatsu practice are born of the same philosophy of healing towards positive change. "My music, sometimes it can be quite abrasive. But still, I want it to be like a massage, something that sends a signal to the system: it's OK, you can relax," she explains. "What shiatsu does the best is that it calms the nervous system, and particularly the parasympathetic system – the one that is responsible for auto-repair. Our body is always trying to heal itself, that's its job, but stress comes in the way of that. So when you're stressed you can't go into repair – that's why stress is the cause of so many diseases. Fear is another thing that will interfere.

"In shiatsu, we always keep a hand on the body of the patient," she continues. "We call it the mother hand, because a lot of us have abandonment issues, and that's terrible for the nervous system. So it's like, I'm with you, I'm not abandoning you. The hand will move around the body but never disconnect." This aspect of shiatsu in particular is reflected in "The Inner Smile", where Sadier and a member sing together, a constant, overlapping presence like two moving hands, guiding the listener through a

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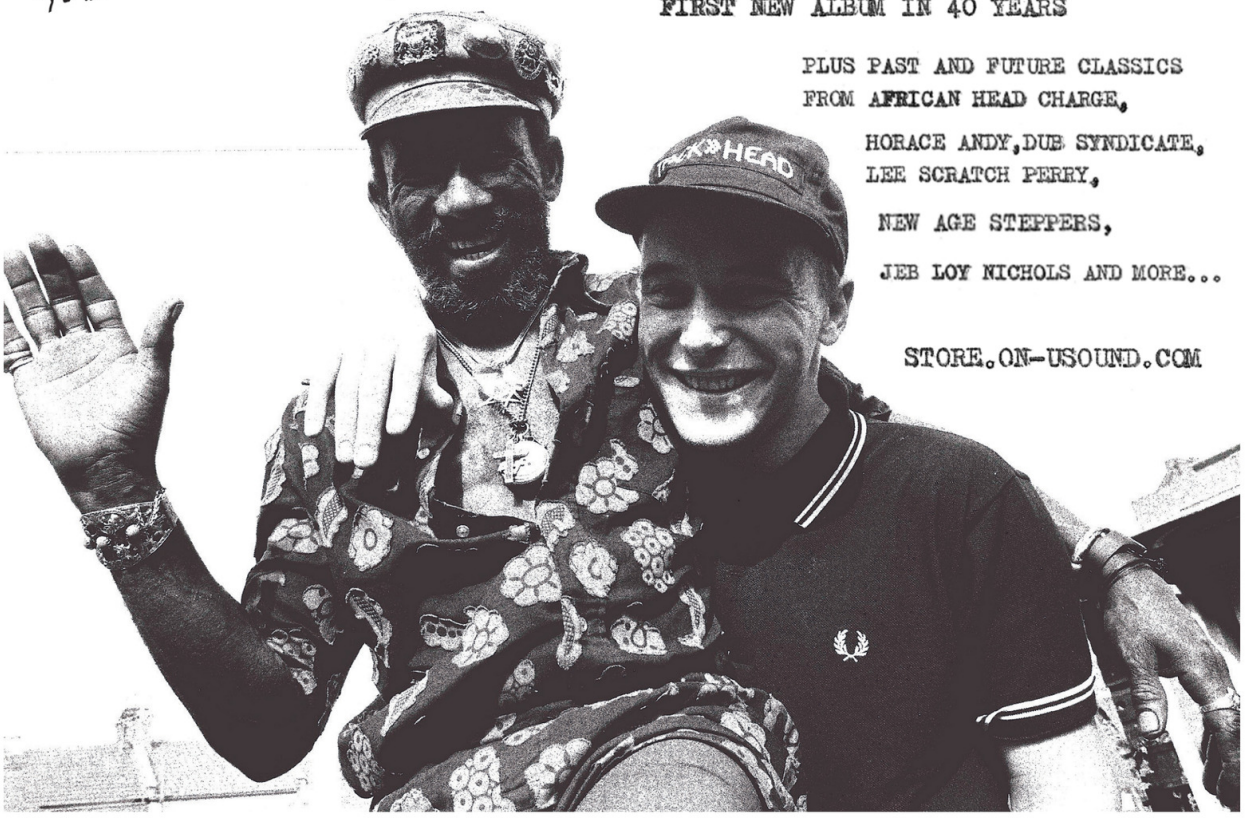

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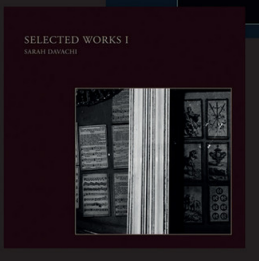

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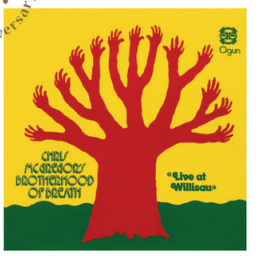

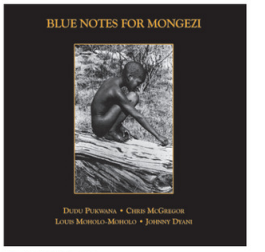

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gratitude ritual that manages to be both unselfconsciously earnest and a little silly (*"Smile at your spleen/Inundate it with light and be serene/Smile at your kidneys/Lights cascading"*).

Although the zen of "The Inner Smile" seems far removed from, say, the bleak consumerist critique of Stereolab's *Dots And Loops,* it actually represents an evolution of thought, a shift into action against contemporary horrors. "Maybe my purpose in this life is to be a healer," Sadier muses. "I do believe we each have a purpose, we're not useless, stupid creatures that just pollute. It's amazing how society always tells us we're just consumers. We all have unique gifts. They're needed, everyone's needed."

Rooting For Love's final track "Cloud 6" is a call to recognise and embody our individual purposes for the collective good (*"You have a power I haven't got/I have a power you don't have/ We need all the power we can get"*). This proactive message, like much of Sadier's work, is shaded with musical and lyrical darkness, ending with her spitting to her listener that *"I'm not fucking around... you're halfway dead"* – a stark reminder of the urgency of the work she's asking us to do.

Sadier's bite is key to the resonance of her work – with Stereolab, her many other projects, and on *Rooting For Love*. For all she talks of healing from trauma and embodying purpose, her music reflects complex reality, not baseless woo-woo.

"It's not in denial that there is darkness out there," concludes Sadier. "I am an idealist and I own that, but I'm not a kitsch idealist. I do think that we create our reality. For some people, it makes them jump to the ceiling to hear something like that, because a lot of people have really shit realities. But I do think that if you're negative all the time, and if you're nihilistic all the time, then indeed, your life is pretty shit, you know? You can go through life thinking that you're just a piece of shit on the sofa watching TV, with absolutely no purpose. Or you can create your own purpose." ● *Laetitia Sadier's* Rooting For Love *is released by Drag City in February*

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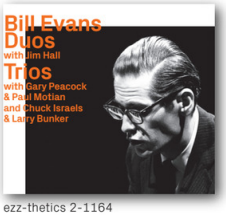

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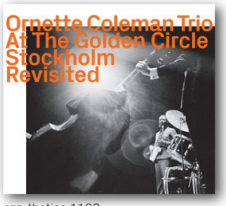

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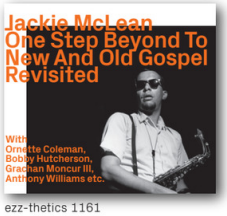

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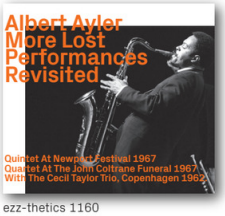

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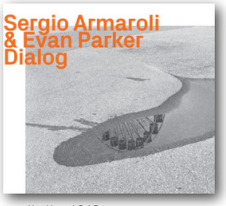

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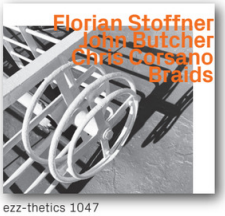

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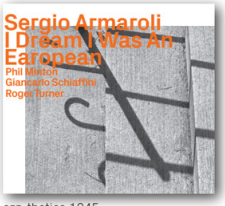

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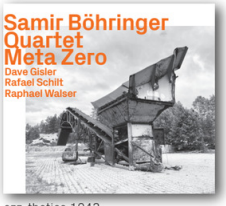

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Take it to the Bridge

Fred Frith

Half a century after *Guitar Solos*, the Henry Cow veteran returns to the scene of the crime with a redux version of his groundbreaking experiments

By Clive Bell
Photography by Mark Davis

Oh no! Fred Frith's guitar is lost. It's the same guitar he was playing back in the Henry Cow days, and it's gone missing somewhere in Europe. Frith is on the first leg of a tour with Portuguese trumpeter Susana Santos Silva: Cologne, Krakow, Brussels, Karlsruhe, that's just this week. By the time I catch up with him by Zoom he's in Bern, Switzerland. An airline mislaid his guitar, but then found it and sent it on. "They follow along behind," he chuckles. "People have been joking that I should play more viola." Frith retrieved his missing instrument by heading to the airport at 11pm and refusing to budge until it arrived.

It's also the same 1936 Gibson he was using in 1974 when he made his debut solo record, *Guitar Solos*. On the black and white cover photo by Ray Smith, Frith stands with guitar on a cricket pitch. The only other visible object is a white, slatted cricket sight screen (the screen placed behind the bowler to help the batsman see the rapidly approaching ball).

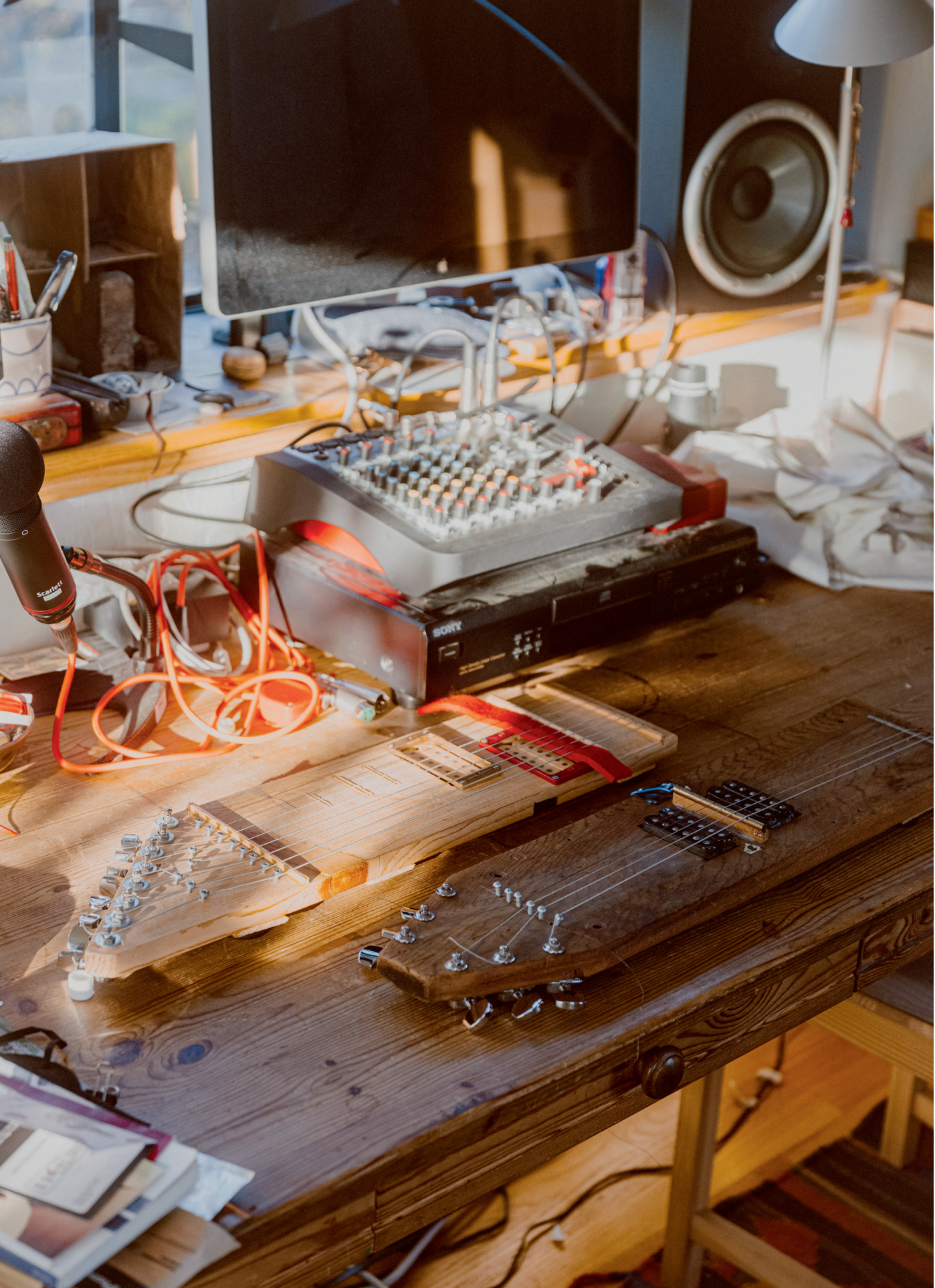
Avant garde but strangely approachable, fun even, *Guitar Solos* caused a stir. Here was entertainment and musical delicacy in an unexpected place – an experimental rock album. *NME* critics voted it an album of the year, and Charles Shaar Murray called it "a totally revolutionary album". Brian Eno invited Frith onto his next two albums.

That was 50 years ago, and now Jan Lankisch of Cologne's Week-End Records proposes to reissue *Guitar Solos* in 2024 with a separate side order of fresh material, which will be collected together as a double LP. At first Frith had compiled an album's worth of recordings from the past five decades, but then Lankisch suggested a new recording. Frith was game: "I said, if we're making a new one, the only thing that makes sense – because I play the same guitar I had then – is we try to have the studio set up in the way it was back in the day, which means using multiple sound sources from that guitar. For the original *Guitar Solos* I had the stereo guitar plus a pickup at the wrong end of the neck, plus a microphone on my seat, plus a microphone on my breath, plus a microphone on the guitar itself, plus a couple of room mics. So it was nine or ten tracks, which we were mixing. It was a panoply of different angles on the same material. So we did that, we set it up as close as possible. And it became apparent that a lot of it was not really relevant any more," he laughs.

The 1974 record was done at the London Camden Town studio of David Vorhaus. "He was a South African ski instructor electronic music person," recalls Frith. "I mean an exotic character, kind of an electronics genius." Vorhaus was notably part of the trio White Noise, alongside the BBC Radiophonic Workshop's Delia Derbyshire and Brian Hodgson. "He had built himself a multitrack tape recorder out of a computer. Well, computers in those days... it was big and it was actually in the room, and it made so much mechanical noise that it was impossible to tell what the guitar really sounded like." Frith attempts an impression: "*Harum-papa-parum...* the net result was that the record has a lot more bass in it, because we couldn't hear that. We overcompensated, and it added to the nature of the sound being somewhat orchestral rather than instrumental. And that was partly accidental. But having established that as an aesthetic, it's not difficult to imagine the guitar in that way when recording it now. It's just a hell of a lot easier now than it was then!"

My vinyl copy of *Guitar Solos* was purchased in 1974 for £1.75. On the back is another Ray Smith photograph, this time a close-up of Frith playing strings with a glass prism. It turns out

Fred Frith at home in Santa Rosa, California, November 2023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"Record companies would take the guitar player and turn him into a hero, which would help to sell records. So there was all of that commercial thing going on. I couldn't be less interested in that. I was not a guitar hero, I couldn't do those things, it's not my vocabulary. I could do what I could do but I wasn't going to be the next Jeff Beck."

up in Yorkshire, I went to Cambridge – my first experiences of any kind of music were going to concerts while I was a student. I hadn't been to anything before that. I was blissfully unaware of the London improvisation scene. I went to see Derek [Bailey] play in 1971, at this concert where I was the only person in the audience, and we became friends as a result of that. But I never went to any other concerts at [London's] Little Theatre Club, that was the only one I ever went to. And I think if I had known about a lot of the stuff that was happening then, I probably wouldn't have made the record!

"I would have been so aware of, you know, I shouldn't be doing this because somebody else is doing it, or whatever," he continues. "I would have been afraid. Especially given my background and my general feeling of insecurity. I was only able to do it because I was absolutely naive and therefore completely sure of myself."

In fact the context for making an improvised electric guitar record in 1974 is pretty strange. Way before the London Musicians Collective, *Musics* magazine, *The Wire*, the internet – who knew what was going on? The cognoscenti knew of Evan Parker and Derek Bailey...

"Derek and I were friends," clarifies Frith, "but clearly his way of playing had no impact on the way I was playing guitar. Many other people would say, oh, it sounds just like Derek – that would make Derek laugh, because we were chalk and cheese. The context was that Henry Cow had made their first record. We'd been together for five years and finally all the little bits and pieces started to come together. We had signed with Virgin Records, so suddenly we were full of ourselves and sure that this thing was going to happen. So it was an exciting... and another completely naive moment, because it was clear that nobody else thought that way! Virgin were putting money into it. And they said, 'Fred, we want you to make a solo record.' At the time the feeling was that what record companies did in situations like that, they would try and create a hero. They would take the guitar player and turn him into a hero, which would help to sell records. So there was all of that commercial thing going on. I couldn't be less interested in that. I was not a guitar hero, I couldn't do those things, it's not my vocabulary. I could do what I could do but I wasn't going to be the next Jeff Beck."

However, I point out, you had a lot of ideas. "I gave myself a deadline," Frith goes on. "We reserved the studio for three or four days, and two weeks before I went into the studio I started thinking about the guitar. Like, what is this instrument? What does it consist of? Wood and strings... I had the pickup at the wrong end, I had these new techniques that I was developing. I was consciously going into the studio trying to rethink the guitar as a completely different instrument. I mean, the fact that I thought I could do that still makes me laugh now! I was very sure of it, and I spent two weeks really working on it. And I went into the studio and did it."

Frith has a website where you can see what he's up to and where he's playing next. I don't like to look too closely because I feel fatigued just reading his touring schedule. When we talk at the end of November 2023, the first leg of his three week Laying Demons To Rest tour with Susana Santos Silva is concluding. The duo will reconvene in January for another three weeks, while in between Henry Now (Henry Cow's current incarnation) have a couple of shows in the Czech Republic. I'm impressed, I tell him, that he still welcomes this much activity.

"Well, I'm not much of a one for every night a different place, a different hotel, always the same system," Frith confesses. "The way we do tours is: we went to Berlin, I had a day off, I did a workshop with some students for the jazz festival, and they had a screening of [the 1990 Frith documentary] *Step Across The Border*. The concert was not only with Susana, but with Mariá Portugal, who's a Brazilian drummer I've become very interested in playing with. So we had a little trio there. We were in the Music Unlimited festival in Wels, in Austria – we added gabby fluke-mogul and Paola Sanchez on cello and violin, so we had a quartet there. Then we had some more duos, I had a solo somewhere – I like the variety of doing different things. In the middle of this tour I went and visited some friends up in the mountains in Switzerland for a couple of nights, because we were close by. So it's very congenial. It's not industrial touring – it's social touring!" He laughs. "The fact of the matter is, I have been doing pretty much what I love to do with the people I love to do it with, pretty much all the way along. So, you know, why would I stop that?"

Frith's opera premiered in Paris and Nantes in 2023. Julie Gilbert's libretto retells the legend of Echo and Narcissus in a post-truth world reeking of Musk and Trump. As for the music, a pair of countertenor and mezzo-soprano singers are joined by a 13 piece instrumental ensemble, consisting of Frith himself plus old pals like Ikue Mori, Zeena Parkins, Lotte Anker, Tilman Müller and Garth Knox, as well as newer faces encountered during Frith's teaching spells in Basel: Camille Émaille, Xavière Fertin, Alexandre Cahen and Gabriel Valtchev.

Frith chuckles – "You can't make this shit up" – as he recounts the opera's origins. "I was talking to my brother Christopher in another context, and he said, 'I was thinking that maybe I should commission an opera from you.' I said, have you any idea how much an opera would cost? We laughed and brushed it off. And the next day these people from Paris [from the Sons d'hiver festival] called and said, 'Hey, we'd like to commission an opera.' I immediately called my brother and said you're not going to believe what just happened. He's a neuroscientist and he said, 'That kind of thing happens much too often.'"

Although everything was alright on the night, the process of staging the opera sounds fraught. On the point of starting to compose, Frith punctured his Achilles tendon playing soccer with his great-nephews. He ended up on crutches with a boot for three months – "And that allowed me to sit in the mountains in Switzerland and compose an opera, because there was nothing else to do!" After that, he laments, "Everything that could possibly go wrong went wrong." Two singers, the lighting designer and the sound designer all resigned, each for unrelated reasons, before work even started. Eventually the team put on a great show, but Frith confesses to feeling slightly let down that so much good quality work has so far only resulted in two performances. Now he's hoping to restage it in 2025.

Which leaves us to consider Henry Now – the key is in the name, serving as a reminder that this is not a nostalgia project. The Henry Cow members have stayed good friends and in touch. The last time I saw Tim Hodgkinson he was performing with Mark Wastell and Phil Durrant, and had just played a small role in a gangster film – another musician apparently untouched by

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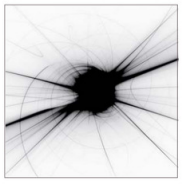

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TO ABSENCE

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WINDSCALE

SUUMHOW
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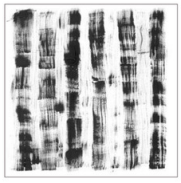

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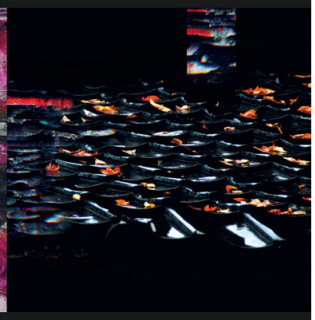

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the passing of time. In 2014 the band reunited to celebrate the music of their late bassoonist, Lindsay Cooper. After that, Frith tells me, there were discussions about whether to do more, but differences of opinion emerged about what that might consist of. In the meantime Cow bassist John Greaves suggested they play for his friend Max's birthday party in 2023. More concerts followed in Palermo and the Czech Republic, plus I can see one coming up in 2024 in Barcelona. "My interest," confides Frith, "would be to be more open and flexible. I don't want it to be in any way nostalgic, or always the same people, because it was never always the same people back then. Sometimes I wouldn't even be there – it would become more like a holding company for ideas. Which feels more like what the group was at the time. And I don't think everybody agrees about that. So whether we'll ever do anything more I really don't know - it could happen."

"Nobody should expect a revival," proclaims the publicity for the Barcelona show. "The only thing they've brought from the past is their principles." I have a fleeting memory – can it be true? – of Henry Cow in 1971 wrapping themselves around an encore of Rufus Thomas's "Walking The Dog". Which would be nice. But I'm not holding my breath. ● *Fred Frith's* Guitar Solos and Fifty *are released by Week-End in February*

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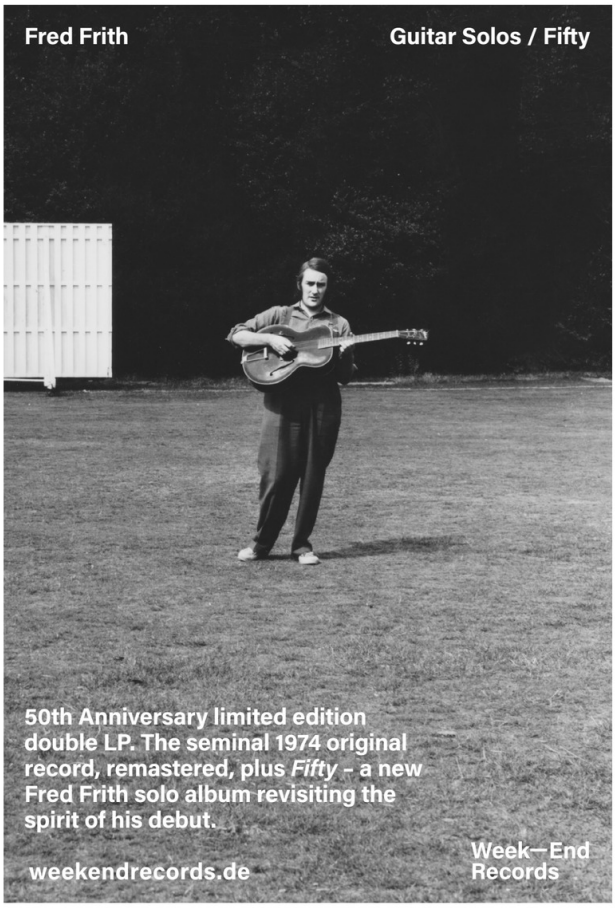

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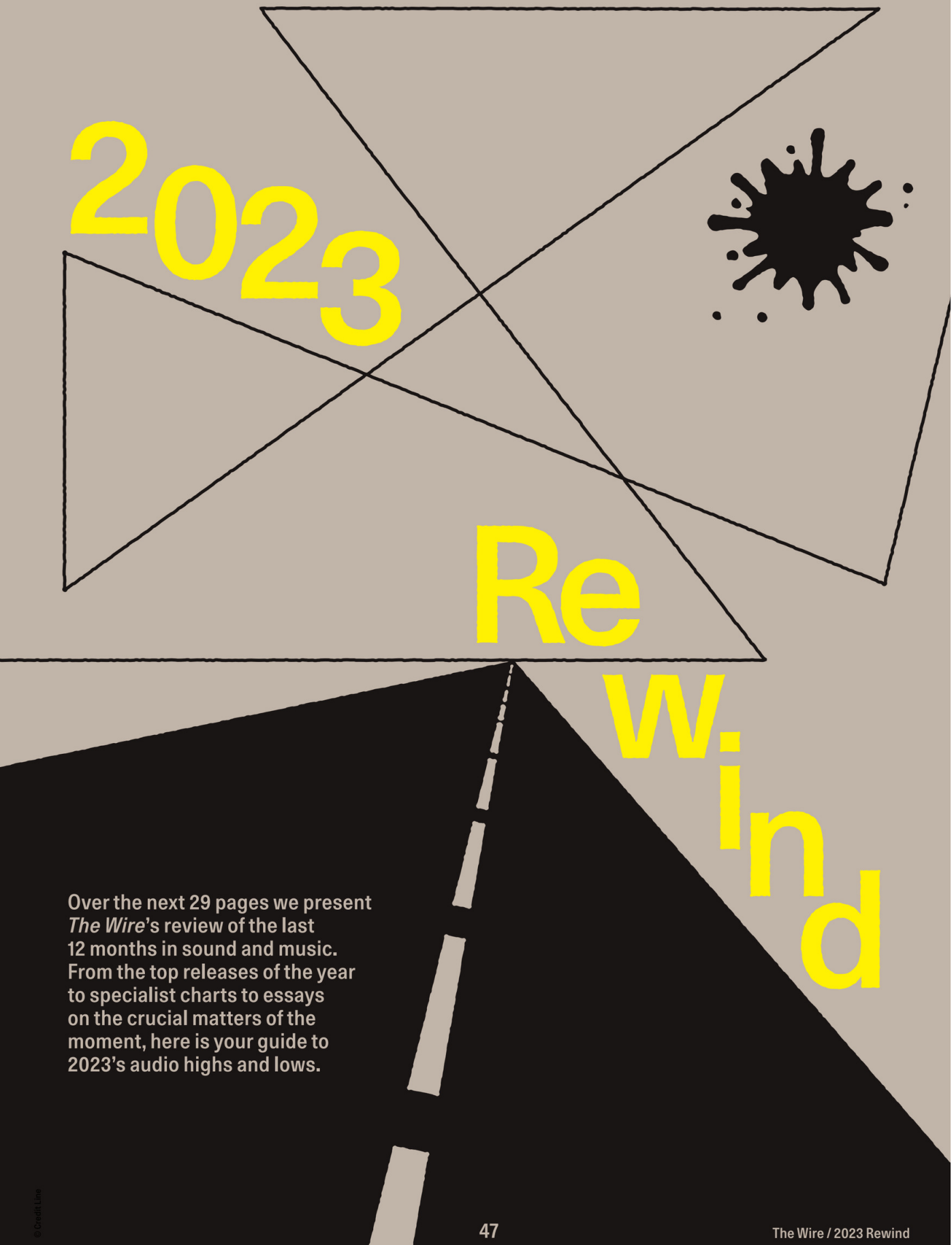

Over the next 29 pages we present *The Wire*'s review of the last 12 months in sound and music. From the top releases of the year to specialist charts to essays on the crucial matters of the moment, here is your guide to 2023's audio highs and lows.

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Releases of the Year

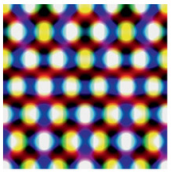
1–50

1 Yo La Tengo
This Stupid World
(Matador)

The indie rock veterans returned with their strongest set since 2000's *And Then Nothing Turned Itself Inside-Out.* The fuzzy motorik of "Sinatra Drive Breakdown" drove one of Ira Kaplan's spikiest guitar freakouts, while the Georgia Hubley ballad "Aselestine" captured them at their most delicate. Neil Kulkarni said: "I was wondering whether I needed a new Yo La Tengo album... I curse my slackness – they're on fire here and now... sounding freer, looser and more magnificent than ever." (March/469)

2 Philip Jeck & Chris Watson
Oxmardyke
(Touch)

Completed before Jeck's death in 2022, *Oxmardyke* is a meditation on place and loss, via Watson's railway gate box recordings enhanced by Jeck's electronics. Spenser Tomson said: "The most striking aspect of *Oxmardyke* is the sense of loss running through it... Watson's input catalogues a sense of recent loss, Jeck's murky electronics probe deeper, making contact with everything that has soaked into the ground where *Oxmardyke* stands." (July/473)



3 Darius Jones
fLuXkit Vancouver (its suite but sacred)
(Northern Spy/We Jazz)

Emerging from a series of residencies at Vancouver's Western Front, Jones's suite for saxophone, drums and string quartet made inspired use of Western and graphic notation, Greek myth and archival research. Emily Pothast said: "The overarching ethos of Jones's work lies in the belief that both musical ensembles and the sonic forms that emerge through them can serve as models for methods of social interaction... a sweetness forged in the secret fire of creative." (October/476)

4 Khanate
To Be Cruel
(Sacred Bones)

Marking the avant metal quartet's return after 17 years, *To Be Cruel* was a seething mass of curdled riffs and oppressive silences, harrowed by Alan Dubin's vocals and Stephen O'Malley's experimental guitar, with bassist James Plotkin and percussionist Tim Wyskida bringing an orchestral density. James Gormley said: "Their blueprint isn't really the feted drone/doom metal paradigm; more so its bluesier, jagged sibling, sludge, which they abstract to the very limits of its form." (July/473)

5 Matana Roberts
Coin Coin Chapter Five: In The Garden
(Constellation)

The latest in Matana Roberts's *Coin Coin* series wove together free jazz, modern composition, folk and electronics to tell the grimly relevant story of a female relative who died from complications after an illegal abortion. Daniel Neofetou said: "An account of stifling domesticity plays out over a propulsive 4/4 rock beat and swirling woodwinds, which serve to evoke how, in spite of everything, she felt *"electric, alive, spirited, fire and free"*". (October/476)

6 Mariam Rezaei
BOWN
(Heat Crimes)

A virtuosic display from composer/turntablist Rezaei, who transformed samples made by herself and Teresa Winter, Gwilly Edmondez, Bobby Glew and Lukas Koenig into constantly shifting new forms. Xenia Benivolski said: "*BOWN* starts off with a witchy hum... that quickly becomes more demanding and playful as a yelping, whistling vortex of distorted vocals whirr around in a manic swarm. It's like being in the eye of a possessed tornado. But that's just the beginning." (November/477)

7 Irreversible Entanglements
Protect Your Light
(Impulse!)

For their Impulse! debut, liberation jazz collective Irreversible Entanglements delivered their warmest work to date, rhythms and sunny melodies, the title track and "Free Love" in particular being odes to collective joy. Yet Moor Mother aka Camae Ayewa's polemics remain as sharp as ever. Phil Freeman said: "This is a major statement from artists who are as much the new wave of jazz as John Coltrane, Albert Ayler, Archie Shepp et al were in their day." (September/475)

8 Mendoza Hoff Revels
Echolocation
(AUM Fidelity)

One of the most gifted guitarists of her generation, Ava Mendoza teamed up with bassist Devin Hoff, saxophonist James Brandon Lewis and drummer Ches Smith to deliver an exhilarating set of 21st century jazz rock. Edwin Pouncey said: "Each member of the group plays their own essential part in making the sound materialise like a single physical entity, with all of them coming together to pump the beating heart and active brain inside the body of music created." (December/478)

9 Cassandra Miller
Traveller Song/Thanksong
(Black Truffle)

The first vinyl release from London based Canadian composer Miller presented two compositions based on existing work. "Traveller Song" embedded a recording of herself singing an Italian folksong. On "Thanksong", a string quartet played Beethoven by ear. Julian Cowley said: "Miller has clearly lost none of her desire to unsettle indifference and to enchant with surprises [...] That imaginative twist draws out an air of intimacy that is Miller's personal touch." (November/477)

10 Aksak Maboul
Une Aventure De VV (Songspiel)
(Crammed Discs)

Multi-instrumentalist Marc Hollander and singer/lyricist Véronique Vincent's reactivated Rock In Opposition ensemble ran the gamut of aesthetics and atmospheres – club music, vaporwave, electronic chanson, free improv, fusion. Antonio Poscic said: "A contemporary vision of an idiosyncratic band whose music remains unmistakable even though they never really had a specific sound... a piece of remarkable sonic theatre incarnated in 15 captivating vignettes." (May/471)

11 Raphael Rogiński
Talàn
(Instant Classic)

Polish guitarist, composer and musicologist Raphael Rogiński shared his fascination with the Black Sea on this magical solo album. Several pieces were composed in Odesa, a city often thought of as a gateway to Asia, and where some of his ancestors arrived in Europe. Miloš Hroch said: "Amplified plucks and slides of fingers on the fretboard, combined with repetitive wandering melodies, make the album all the more powerful." (January+February 2024/479+480)

12 Ruth Anderson & Annea Lockwood
Tête-À-Tête
(Ergot)

Ruth Anderson and Annea Lockwood were, in the latter's words, "joyously entangled". *Tête-À-Tête* collected unreleased archival material and new works. Following Anderson's death in 2019, Lockwood revisited the latter's 1974 "Conversations" in "For Ruth". Hannah Pezzack said: "Reverberating with snatches of breath, exhales and laughter... an almost erotic intimacy infused with the voyeuristic pleasure of eavesdropping on two twin-spirited artists falling in love." (July/473)

13 Nick Dunston
Skultura
(Tripticks Tapes/Fun In The Church)

Berlin based American bassist/composer Dunston blurred the lines between post-production and live improvisation on a kaleidoscopic trip through free jazz, folk, modular synthesis, sound poetry and beat science. Daniel Neofetou said: "Overdetermined sounds are recontextualised within a tightly wound and yet diaphanous sci-fi soundscape... "Vaquero Negro" eventually finds its way to ending on an upbeat quasi-bluegrass rhythm." (September/475)

14 Sunik Kim
Potential
(Otoroku)

Kim's second LP took a wrecking ball to the boundaries of computer music, using MIDI software to create a frenetic collage of synthesized strings and brass, Cecil Taylor-like piano clusters and electronics. Antonio Poscic said: "*Potential* opens with a cannonade of piano chords and fragments of inchoate noise, followed by a surge of synthetic trumpets and chromatic, organlike stabs... placed in this deranged context [these sounds] become something completely alien." (August/474)

15 AMM
Last Calls
(Matchless)

In July 2022, AMM performed their final concert at London's Cafe Oto. Unable to attend on doctor's orders, John Tilbury contributed recordings of his piano. Keith Rowe played electronics, while Eddie Prévost manipulated percussion. Reviewing the concert, Clive Bell said: "Prévost applies a bow to the edge of his large gong and we're off into the swirling sands, the audio mirages of AMM-land... the duo's timing is as effortless as you might expect after half a century of doing this." (October 2022/464)

16 Dorothy Moskowitz & The United States Of Alchemy
Under An Endless Sky
(Tompkins Square)

Former United States Of America member Moskowitz worked with Italian composer Francesco Paolo Paladino and lyricist Luca Chino Ferrari on songs set to dense orchestral textures and bursts of musique concrète. Leah Kardos said: "*Under An Endless Sky* has an open and obvious affection for Moskowitz and her legacy... it speaks to our present moment with a yearning generosity and the kind of deep knowing that only comes with age." (March/469)

17 The Clientele
I Am Not There Anymore
(Merge)

London indie stalwarts The Clientele's seventh album fused 1960s chamber pop with fingerstyle guitar and shuffling drum loops. Alasdair MacLean's enchanting melodies and surrealist influenced lyrics pointed towards an expansive artistic vision that goes far beyond the narrow preoccupations of much indie. The epic "Fables Of The Silverlink" evoked Love's *Forever Changes*, Donovan and Chris Bell, while the "Radial" piano miniatures suggested an affinity with Satie's *Gymnopédies.*

18 Noname
Sundial
(Awal Recordings America, Inc)

Chicago rapper Noname's third album combined a deceptively relaxed flow with sweet soul, cool jazz and taut beats. Grounded in revolutionary politics, her storytelling lyrics showed wit, intelligence and emotional breadth. Richard Stacey said: "There's no denying that *Sundial* is a godsend for anyone who likes their rap classics messy... but though Noname identifies as a socialist she's not one to let ideology or commercial realities kill her sense of uninhibited playfulness." (October/476)

19 ANOHNI And The Johnsons
My Back Was A Bridge For You To Cross
(Rough Trade)

Following her collaborations with Oneohtrix Point Never and Hudson Mohawke, ANOHNI reunited with The Johnsons for an album that built on the graceful chamber pop of their earlier releases. The tender soul of "It Must Change" felt like a warm hug, while the searing "Go Ahead" captured ANOHNI at her most defiant. Joshua Minsoo Kim said: "The lucidity behind every message... is arresting, as it is drawing from a well of pure emotion that can be comprehended in full." (July/473)

20 Ryuichi Sakamoto
12
(Commmons)

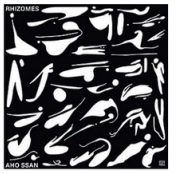
Sakamoto's 15th and final studio album was a stripped down affair, created single-handedly during his recovery from cancer treatment. The composer's breath can be heard over his piano and synthesizer, lending an emotional weight to these delicate sketches. Claire Biddles said: "His 'perpetual sound' is no longer literal, but rather points to an ongoing sequence of melody, beats, sounds – the noise of life, made, captured and collected in the limited time each of us has." (February/468)

21 Laura Ortman
SOUND RINGS SHIMMERS ENDLESS BLUR
(The dustdiveflash/Bandcamp)

The New York based White Mountain Apache musician/composer's album largely focused on song – including a haunting nod to Roy Orbison – with Ortman embedding her vocals within gauzy, atmospheric textures of amplified violin, keyboards and guitar. Julian Cowley said: "Ortman here once again channels her memories, sensations and perceptions into forms that are immediately inviting, continuously shape-shifting, consistently intriguing." (January+February 2024/479+480)

22 Madhuvanti Pal
The Holy Mother (Plays The Rudra Veena)
(Sublime Frequencies)

Madhuvanti Pal is a master of the Rudra Veena. A stick zither, with two large gourds attached to a hollowed neck, the instrument dates back over 2000 years and is widely used in Dhrupad, the oldest form of Indian classical music. Women have always played the instrument, but Pal is the first female practitioner to release an LP. One of the new generation of Rudra Veena artists, Madhuvanti plays a modified Dagar-style instrument. The music unfolds in a reverie of undulating melodies and phased drones.



23 Aho Ssan
Rhizomes
(Other People)

On his second album, Parisian Aho Ssan aka Niamké Désiré introduced an experimental music who's who – Moor Mother, Clipping, Nicolás Jaar, 9T Antiope, Valentina Magaletti, Angel Bat Dawid – into a sci-fi aesthetic combining signal processing and post-apocalyptic crunch. Daniel Neofetou said: "Commissioned by the French electroacoustic institution Ina-GRM... [*Rhizomes*] is most engaging when unexpected elements appear amid its dystopian soundscapes." (October/476)

24 billy woods & Kenny Segal
Maps
(Backwoodz Studioz)

On *Maps*, New York rapper billy woods reunited with Los Angeles producer Kenny Segal, taking Danny Brown, Elucid, Shabaka Hutchings, Quelle Chris, Aesop Rock and Future Islands' Sam Herring along for the ride. Neil Kulkarni said: "Because woods and Segal retain a steely sense of control over proceedings... it feels like you're slowly getting immersed into their sonic picture painting, even if there seems an almost wilful perversity in the way the record refuses to cohere and comfort." (June/472)

25 Angel Bat Dawid
Requiem For Jazz
(International Anthem)

Requiem For Jazz engaged with Edward O Bland's 1959 film *The Cry Of Jazz*, featuring early footage of Sun Ra Arkestra. Marshall Allen joined Dawid's large ensemble to create a powerful collective sound. David Grundy said: "An important recording... Dawid suggests that discourse and discussion are nothing without the healing and sometimes confrontational power of music itself, the 'loving conversation', as she puts it, 'that we need to have with each other'." (September/475)

26 Svitlana Nianio & Tom James Scott
Eye Of The Sea
(Skire)

Ukraine's Nianio and North West England's Scott recorded the album via correspondence throughout 2020, Nianio adding her voice and electronics to Scott's piano sketches, before passing the tapes back to him for futher adornment. As Nianio told Olena Pohonchenkova in *The Wire* 474: "I still look for deeper transparency, for beauty, like in a hallucination, or a dream."

27 Bill Orcutt
The Anxiety Of Symmetry
(Fake Estates)

In parallel to his guitar based recordings on Palilalia, Bill Orcutt has released a series of electronic 'counting records' on its sister label Fake Estates. Using his own Cracked software, he fashioned six samples of female voices singing the number of the corresponding note value in the first six pitches of a major scale into a set of phrases that were looped and layered, creating polyrhythms, syncopation and harmony. A luscious and heady dose of ecstatic minimalism.

28 Fever Ray
Radical Romantics
(Mute/Rabid)

On their third album as Fever Ray, Stockholm based artist Karin Dreijer offered a suite of electronic pop songs that reflected the ambiguities, tensions and pleasures of modern love. Sam Davies said: "Dreijer... draws on the deep crosscurrents at the heart of synth pop and glam. Pop hooks and club-ready rhythms warp with bubblegum plasticity from track to track, never repeating but luxuriating in the excess of their own ideas." (April/470)

29 Coffin Prick
Laughing
(Sophomore Lounge)

The title track of Ryan Weinstein's solo debut recalled Eno's *Another Green World*. Yet its warped pop smarts and hermetic atmospheres owed as much to Chrome, Devo and The Residents. James Gormley said: "The result is a stroboscopic carousel of a record glowing with chimerical afterimages. It slips from one stylistic register to another like quicksilver grey adders, but it's more clearly defined by interstices between one and another than by either." (September/475)

30 Škvíry & Spoje
Hotel Spojár
(Circum-Disc)

Translating as Cracks & Joints, Czech/Slovak experimental unit Škvíry & Spoje's name aptly described their ad hoc take on improvisation drawn from free jazz, noise, traditional music and polyrhythmic hypnogroove. Andy Hamilton said: "The A and B sides, which feature the band live, begin with a curdling, disturbed cornucopia of electronic and acoustic sounds that collapses into sporadic white noise... a richly imagined, vibrant and sometimes roiling release." (December/478)

31 Wadada Leo Smith & Orange Wave Electric
Fire Illuminations
(Kabell)

Aided by guitarists Nels Cline and Brandon Ross, bassists Bill Laswell and Melvin Gibbs, and percussionists Mauro Refosco and Pheeroan akLaff, Smith embarked on a journey through Hendrix, electric Miles and fusion. Neil Kulkarni said: "If someone told you *Fire Illuminations* was a recently uncovered annex to [Miles Davis's] *The Cellar Door Sessions* 1970 you wouldn't bat an eyelid. But that shouldn't distract or detract from this richly rewarding album." (June/472)

32 Liv.e
Girl In The Half-Pearl
(In Real Life)

Deconstructing soul, jazz, hiphop and drum 'n' bass, the second album from Los Angeles based artist Liv.e emerged from the creative and personal liberation she experienced since her 2020 debut. Mosi Reeves said: "Her savvy use of edits and vocal effects may create a sense of whimsy, but they don't feel like a distraction. She retains a sense of purpose as she modulates between audible joy and lyrical reflection." (April/470)

33 Animal Collective
Isn't It Now?
(Domino)

Animal Collective's 2022 album *Time Skiffs* was recorded remotely to a click track, but *Isn't It Now?* saw them back together in the studio, digging into their love of Beach Boys and psychedelia, while allowing an interest in Renaissance music to bloom. Neil Kulkarni said: "An outpouring of ideas that plots a course between sprawl and succinctness... you sense the band's delight at their reconvening, and their Byrdsian harmonies are immaculately suggestive and moving." (November/477)

34 Ale Hop & Laura Robles
Aqua Dulce
(Buh)

Teeming with polyrhythms and electronic tessellations, *Agua Dulce* emerged from improvisations by Berlin based Peruvians Alejandra Cárdenas aka Ale Hop (guitar, electronics) and Laura Robles (electric cajón). Leah Kardos said: "*Agua Dulce* evokes a sense of displacement as it pulls apart the traditional dance rhythms of coastal Peru, deconstructing and mutating familiar cajón patterns... into sonic textures that highlight the dislocated legacies of Afro-Peruvian music." (May/471)

35 Jason Moran
From The Dancehall To The Battlefield
(Yes)

Jason Moran's tribute to James Reece Europe reimagined tunes by or associated with the pioneering Black pianist, bandleader and composer of the early 1900s, putting them in conversation with the modern jazz of Albert Ayler and Geri Allen, and the decelerated rhythms of DJ Screw. David Grundy said: "Such music is a way of mixing up time, refusing to stick to the predetermined or the known... dancing behind or ahead of the beat, imagining another world." (May/471)

36 GAIKA
Drift
(Big Dada)

Palpably influenced by Prince, Wu-Tang and *Mezzanine*-era Massive Attack, GAIKA's new album was a shape-shifting body of work with hiphop and club music cultures at its core. GAIKA also engaged with his contemporaries, referencing Klein on "Vicious Chambers" and trading verses with Bbymutha on "Lady". Misha Farrant said: "Much of the guitar work... recalls breathing through dirt, interrupting gaseous vocals... the album cuts across a plethora of genres, refusing to be static." (September/475)

37 jaimie branch
Fly Or Die Fly Or Die Fly Or Die ((World War))
(International Anthem)

Recorded shortly before her death in 2022, jaimie branch's last album fused free jazz, South American music, dub, country and punk. Phil Freeman said: "Tympani, extra horns, synths and effects give the music a dramatic sweep that makes it the most triumphant volume in the series. An at times nearly orchestral realisation of Branch's unique compositional vision, [it] caps off one of the great catalogues in 21st century jazz."

38 B Cool-Aid
Leather Blvd
(Lex)

Maverick rapper Pink Siifu hooked up with producer Ahwlee and a host of collaborators – Butcher Brown, Quelle Chris, Jimetta Rose, Ladybug Mecca – for a bleary-eyed session that paid homage to the music he loves, from West Coast rap and 1990s R&B to John Coltrane. Neil Kulkarni said: "That relaxed, semi-improvisational mixtape vibe sees the music here flow from hiphop to jazz, neo-soul to funk, keeping you on your toes but also appearing natural in its genre-blending." (April/470)

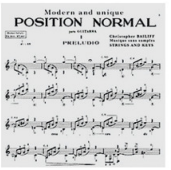
39 Mozart Estate
Pop-Up! Ker-Ching! And The Possibilities Of Modern Shopping
(West Midlands)

The crystalline indie of Felt long behind him, Lawrence dug deeper into the detritus of UK pop culture: second-tier glam, novelty pop and music hall. "Relative Poverty" walked a fine line between satire and romanticism, while "I Wanna Murder You" and "I'm Gonna Wiggle" fused cartoon violence and sleaze with Black Lace leeriness. Proudly synthetic and dripping in irony, *Pop Up!* delighted those invested in the Cult Of Lawrence and left others queasy.

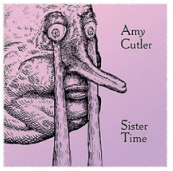
40 Natasha Barrett
Reconfiguring The Landscape
(Bandcamp)

Composer/sound artist Barrett's album remixed multi-loudspeaker ambisonics installations presented in Austria, Norway and Italy. The results merged snatches of conversation, trombone and electronic manipulations with environmental sound. Jo Hutton said: "A dynamic sense of place, social history and acoustic ecology is expressed in her work... music that sounds as impressive and emotive in stereo as it does on a 100 plus loudspeakers in a large installation." (September/475)

41 Mayssa Jallad
Marjaa: The Battle Of The Hotels
(Ruptured/Six Of Swords)

Beruit, 1975: a five month battle between Christian nationalists and pro-Palestinian leftists broke out among the high rise buildings of the city's hotel district. Drawing a map of the battle with her music, vocals and acoustic guitar accompanied by Fadi Tabbal's synths, percussion and field recordings, singer-songwriter and urban researcher Mayssa Jallad aimed to reach the postwar youth who had never been taught this difficult history.

42 Position Normal
Modern And Unique
(No label)

A key artist in the hauntological continuum, Position Normal aka Chris Bailiff offered a disarmingly wonky collection of cellphone-recorded guitar and keyboard instrumentals composed from folk, jazz and nursery rhymes. Spenser Tomson said: "What Bailiff's move away from the samples has caused is to untether their work from the expected hauntological markers... the emotion is stripped of all ephemeral artifice, delivered stark and raw." (December/478)



43 Amy Cutler
Sister Time
(Strategic Tape Reserve)

Working across film, curation, installations, sound art and music to explore the relationship between humans and their environment, creative geographer Amy Cutler excavated her teenage mixtapes for *Sister Time*. Abi Bliss said: "The hooks snag and tangle [evoke] the experience of fixating upon the lilt of a melody or a vocal harmony as an escape route from the repetition and confinement of youth." (July/473)

44 Natural Information Society
Since Time Is Gravity
(Aguirre)

Here including Hamid Drake, Ben LaMar Gay and Ari Brown, Joshua Abrams's ensemble built on his guimbri riffs, with Brown's tenor saxophone emerging as a key voice. Bill Meyer said: "One can experience Abrams's arrangements as conciliatory interventions that reconcile the formal structures of minimalist music and jazz's opportunities for individualist expression... music that is part of a continuum connecting the ancient to the future." (April/470)

45 patten
Mirage FM
(555-5555)

The first album made entirely from text to audio AI-generated sound sources, on *Mirage FM* London's patten created a glistening sonic environment at once familiar and alien from shards of pop, ambient, opera, hiphop, grime and R&B. Neil Kulkarni said: "Each short track hurtles through contrasting sonic worlds and eras, to the point where the listening brain's habits of historic placement and contextualisation are forced to abscond entirely... recommended? Yes. Confusing? Hell yes." (April/470)

47 James Holden
Imagine This Is A High Dimensional Space Of All Possibilities
(Border Community)

Holden's fourth album channelled the optimism and formal excitement of early 1990s ambient techno and European electronic music into a journey through techno, Indian raga and 70s electronic and art rock. Derek Walmsley said: "While many dance albums feel burdened and over-thought, *Imagine This* effortlessly allows a global spectrum of patterns and vibrations to co-exist within the same widescreen space." (April/470)

49 Alternative TV
Direct Action
(Fourth Dimension)

Since their formation in 1977, Mark Perry's Alternative TV shunned punk orthodoxy and instead embraced elements of free jazz, improvisation, industrial and electronic music. Edwin Pouncey said: "This latest collection is probably ATV's best shot yet, a tightly packed selection of involving instrumental pieces that sound detached from punk's primal rage, while still retaining its fiercely independent spirit." (January+February 2024/479+480)

46 The Necks
Travel
(Northern Spy)

The Australian trio's *Travel* was assembled from several improvised sessions. On "Signal", pianist Chris Abrahams draped elegant forms over Lloyd Swanton's insistent bassline and Tony Buck's jazzwise drums, before an organ loomed into view, pushing the music into dub reggae. Antonio Poscic said: "Despite the obvious post-production touches and curation... the four pieces feel authentically extemporaneous and evolve organically, akin to a late night jam between friends." (February/468)

48 Avola
Psykor
(SIGE)

On *Pyskor*, Veronica Avola transformed recordings made at her late grandmother's apartment and funeral home in Italy into pummelling electronics. Spenser Tomson said: "Avola manages to channel the death of an estranged family member and the subsequent emotional journey into a set of pieces finely balanced between introspection and loud, aggressive catharsis." (March/469)

50 James Brandon Lewis/Red Lily Quintet
For Mahalia, With Love
(Tao Forms)

Saxophonist James Brandon Lewis's second album with Red Lily Quintet– cornettist Kirk Knuffke, cellist Christopher Hoffman, bassist William Parker, drummer Chad Taylor – paid homage to gospel singer Mahalia Jackson with luminous takes on spirituals like "Deep River", "Swing Low" and "Wade In The Water". Daniel Spicer said: "This is spiritual jazz in its most fundamental and undiluted form" (October/473)

The Electorate

This year's chart was compiled from the votes of the following contributors and staff (each voter's individual release of the year is shown in brackets)

Yewande Adeniran (Sexyy Red *Hood Hottest Princess*)
Vanessa Ague (Kalia Vandever *We Fell In Turn*)
Robert Barry (Bill Orcutt *The Anxiety Of Symmetry*)
Clive Bell (Philip Jeck & Chris Watson *Oxmardyke*)
Xenia Benivolski (Svitlana Nianio & Tom James Scott *Eye Of The Sea*)
Emily Bick (Coffin Prick *Laughing*)
Claire Biddles (PJ Harvey *I Inside The Old Year Dying*)
Julian Cowley (Aksak Maboul *Une Aventure De VV (Songspiel)*)
Raymond Cummings (Yo La Tengo *This Stupid World*)
Jon Dale (Engelhardt/Seef/Davis *Pry*)
Mlsha Farrant (emmadj *g0drm2*)
Tim Fish (Armand Hammer *We Buy Diabetic Test Strips*)
Phil Freeman (Spirit Adrift *Ghost At The Gallows*)
Noel Gardner (Nuovo Testamento *Love Lines*)
Francis Gooding (Stove God Cooks *If These Kitchen Walls Could Talk*)
James Gormley (Nick Dunston *Skultura*)
Kurt Gottschalk (Art Ensemble Of Chicago *The Sixth Decade*)
Louise Gray (Carol Robinson *The Weather Pieces*)
George Grella (Conway/Lunny/Michelle Mulcahy/Louise Mulcahy/Glackin/O'Connor/O'Brien *Terry Riley In C Irish*)
David Grundy (AMM *Last Calls*)
Andy Hamilton (Mike Baggetta/Jim Keltner/mike watt *Everywhen We Go*)
Jim Haynes (Midwife & Vyva Melinkolya *Orbweaving*)
Tony Herrington (Škviry & Spoje *Hotel Spojár*)
Miloš Hroch (Raphael Rogiński *Talàn*)
Jo Hutton (Christine Abdelnour & Andy Moor *Unprotected Sleep*)
Leah Kardos (ANOHNI And The Johnsons *My Back Was A Bridge For You To Cross*)
Biba Kopf (Laura Ortman *SMOKE RING SHIMMERS ENDLESS BLUR*)
Neil Kulkarni (Fantastic Twins *Two Is Not A Number*)
Dave Mandl (Devin Hoff *Voices From The Empty Moor (Songs Of Anne Briggs)*)
Peter Margasak (Cassandra Miller *Traveller Song/ Thanksong*)
Marc Masters (Ruth Anderson & Annea Lockwood *Tête-À-Tête*)
Ryan Meehan (The Clientele *I Am Not There Anymore*)
Noel Meek (Patrick Shiroishi *I was too young to hear silence*)
Bill Meyer (Yo La Tengo *This Stupid World*)
John Morrison (King Vision Ultra *Shook World (Hosted By Algiers)*)
Joe Muggs (Lila Tirando A Violeta & Sin Maldita *Accela*)
Daniel Neofetou (Litüus *Forever*)
Louis Pattison (Khanate *To Be Cruel*)
Antonio Posci (Aho Ssan *Rhizomes*)
Emily Pothast (Colleen *Le Jour Et La Nuit Du Réel*)
Edwin Pouncey (Khanate *To Be Cruel*)
Mosi Reeves (Mitski *The Land Is Inhospitable And So Are We*)
Simon Reynolds (Lil Yachty *The Ride*)
Ilia Rogatchevski (Fever Ray *Radical Romantics*)
Dave Segal (MV & EE *Green Ark*)
Stewart Smith (Darius Jones *fLuXkit Vancouver*)
Rosie Solomon (Desire Marea *On The Romance Of Being*)
Daniel Spicer (Madhuvanti Pal *The Holy Mother (Plays The Rudra Veena)*)
Richard Stacey (Noname *Sundial*)
Joseph Stannard (Mendoza Hoff Revels *Echolocation*)
Spenser Tomson (Philip Jeck & Chris Watson *Oxmardyke*)
Rob Turner (Philip Jeck & Chris Watson *Oxmardyke*)
Derek Walmsley (Various *Gespensterland*)
Meg Woof (Dean Rodney Jr & The Cowboys *The Yeehaw Moment*)
Shane Woolman (Deena Abdelwahed *Jbal Rrsas*)

Critics' Reflections

Vanessa Ague
I stood under siren-red lights as straight as a statue. No one spoke a word around me, and the bar behind me had already put all the shakers away. All I could hear was radioactive waves of feedback emanating from a stage at the centre of the room, where the Yellow Swans duo of Pete Swanson and Gabriel Mindel Saloman played. Their ever growing, ever mounting layers of noise pulled me in so much that I forgot how to think and remembered how to feel. All I can ask for in any given year is to experience art that changes me, that opens my eyes, that makes me question my being. So I often find myself seeking out art to dissect human nature and find some meaning in all the chaos; much of the time that means waking up at dawn to think and to overthink. But the best live music doesn't do any of that. Instead, it helps me find presence in a world that usually steals me away from it. During Yellow Swans' set at Le Poisson Rouge, I didn't have to think – all I had to do was be and let the noise that encapsulated nearly every emotion take me somewhere far from myself. And when I returned, I remembered what it means to be alive, together, listening.

Robert Barry
So many good records came out this year that it's been impossible to keep up. But as for live gigs, I was thrilled to have my ears pummelled by Hi-Tech at ADAO in Barreiro, Portugal; to have my soul uplifted by Irreversible Entanglements at EartH, London; and to have my mind expanded by KMRU at Maison de la Radio, Paris. It was a pleasure and a privilege to return to France's Présences électronique festival and Portugal's Out.Fest for the first time in many years. I also loved the Lutz Bacher exhibition at Raven Row, London, Jesse Darling and Ghislaine Leung's contributions to the Turner Prize show in Eastbourne, and the Mikhail Karikis show at EMST, Athens. On a personal note, it's been great to get back into playing gigs with my improvising duo Far Rainbow. I'm hugely grateful to Cafe Oto, Iklectik, and the Hundred Years Gallery in London, as well as Brighton's Rossi Bar and Margate's 101 Social for putting us on. And most of all to Bernie and Kristen at the Metaphysical Powers label in Michigan for releasing our cassette *The Blue Hugeness*.

Clive Bell
In March I submit to a full body MRI scan. I don headphones, lie down inside a claustrophobic tube, close my eyes and listen to a series of bludgeoning industrial noises of varying unpleasantness, while being injected with blue dye. Any attempt to compare this experience to reviewing records would just be facetious. And *The Wire* has never tried to inject me with blue dye.

Also in March: Mike Nelson's Extinction Beckons at London's Hayward Gallery. I wander through shabby, threatening rooms where every door hinge squeals; scary but funny. April: Frank Auerbach's self portraits are detonations from a master in his nineties. May: a pair of stunning gamelan concerts – one Javanese dignity, the other Balinese flash – from the resident ensembles at City University; Byron Wallen sits in on trumpet. September: Chris Ofili's vast Grenfell mural *Requiem* opens at Tate Britain. November: David Fincher's new film *The Killer* is a feast of disturbing sound design, with a soundtrack by Trent Reznor.

Xenia Benivolski
Not sure if it's the political or the actual weather that's making me wanna run and hide, but for me this year has been punctuated by recordings that directed my attention back towards the Earth. From Pauline Oliveros's *The Well And The Gentle* and Stuart Dempster's *Underground Overlays From The Cistern Chapel*, both of which were recorded in an underground cistern, to Raven Chacon winning the MacArthur Award in the aftermath of his groundbreaking *Voiceless Mass*, a composition that utilised the spaces of a church to rearrange acoustic priority. In some ways, thinking of space as an instrument provides a brief respite from thinking about time, and especially our time, which seems to hurtle in breakneck speed towards a harsh and unknown future. New records like Mariam Rezaei's *Bown* and Chino Amobi's *French Extremism* capture some of the speed and unbearable intensity of the future closing in. My advice is to keep your ear to the ground.

Emily Bick
We all know what the negatives are this year, and I only have 200 words here – so, good things only. The return of Raven Row gallery in London after a few years' hiatus was a treat – their People Make Television show, saluting the BBC's community programme unit, was full of radical possibilities for living. Carrie Mae Weems's retrospective at the Barbican, packed with her powerful films and cinematic photography, also charmed with its inclusion of her work in dance, and the musicality of her thinking and stagecraft. Glasgow's Sonica Surge festival was full of surprises, and one of the friendliest festivals for experimental music. Other music: a beautifully lit concert by Andrew Poppy at Queen Mary, London; at Cafe Oto, Phill Niblock (with a vocal assist from Loré Lixenberg), mindbending Agadez rock and drone by Etran De L'Aïr, and pranksterish weekend residencies by Carl Stone and Vicki Bennett/People Like Us. Films: Ari Aster's *Beau Is Afraid* and Quentin Dupieux's *Smoking Causes Coughing* and *Incredible But True* made you ask: what the hell was that? Always fine by me. On a personal note, I'm grateful that this year the UK government made me a citizen: it feels good to be home.

Claire Biddles
Another decidedly mixed year – not least due to the passing of personal artistic hero Ryuichi Sakamoto – but the cultural highs were dizzy and revitalising. I had a blast at Counterflows in Glasgow, Supersonic in Birmingham, Carl Stone's London Cafe Oto residency, and shows by Rival Schools, PJ Harvey, L'Rain and Soul Glo. I saw Gregg Araki's *The Doom Generation* at Sundance Film Festival London, and although the year was middling for new films, I adored *May December*, *Birth/Rebirth*, *Passages* and *Return To Seoul*. I got a George Michael tattoo, did "Cherry Bomb" by The Runaways on karaoke and read a million zines and comics, lots by friends.

Two books with overlapping themes have stayed with me all year: the queer clubbing scene report *Raving* by cultural critic

Still from Daniel Weintraub's *Deep Listening: The Story Of Pauline Oliveros* (2023)

Courtesy Capone Productions

Engineered Phantoms

New advances in audio processing have put the power of machine learning within reach of DIY creative musicians

By Abi Bliss

Wojciech Kucharczyk

"FutureTools collects and organises all the best AI tools so YOU too can become superhuman!" So claims the landing page of Futuretools.io, one of several ever growing compendiums of free, freemium and paid apps that reflect how 2023 was the year when artificial intelligence stepped out of the data-mining, playlist-curating shadows and onto the home screens of the previously unaware.

At the time of writing, FutureTools links to 2384 apps, offering mere mortals AI assistance with everything from translation and productivity hacks to avatar generation and AI detection. 76 of them relate to music – a modest proportion, yet an explosion compared with just four years ago when the MIDI based pastiches of MuseNet were the best anyone without access to a supercomputer or the programming skills of Dadabots could hope for.

On the simplest level, machine learning based AI works by making predictions based upon the information fed to it. As a time-based medium experienced simultaneously across milliseconds, minutes and a lifetime of listening, music presents more of a predictive challenge than text or pixels, requiring days of training and processing to generate just a few minutes of low bitrate raw audio.

Many of the current tools on offer – Mubert and Splash Pro are just two – navigate this by instead using machine learning to categorise and sort large banks of existing samples, assembling them in response to text prompts or parameters of genre, tempo, key and mood. Although it's possible to imagine someone turning their outputs to fascinatingly twisted ends, primarily they exist for people who use music rather than make it: the streamers, podcasters and YouTubers hungry for job lots of congenial, royalty free tunes.

Less obvious to casual listeners are those AI tools promising production shortcuts. Beyond the software that enabled John Lennon's vocal to be distilled from a 1977 demo for The Beatles' "Now And Then" are apps for automating mastering, removing reverb, generating beats or seamlessly extending songs. Others such as Utopia Enhance handle the creation of metadata to make your music more discoverable on streaming services, harnessing algorithms to beat the algorithms.

In this landscape, the launch in December 2022 of Riffusion was a gamechanger. Adapted by Seth Forsgren and Hayk Martiros from the text to image AI Stable Diffusion, its solution to the problems of processing audio is instead to train networks on spectrograms, the visual fingerprints of sound. Although this limits the length and quality of generated audio to the information in a 512 by 512 pixel image – still more than that available to Fairlight CMI users – London producer Damien Roach aka patten quickly seized upon the possibilities (see *The Wire* 470). His *Mirage FM* album synthesized nostalgia from the soupy downsampled haze, traversing the in-between zones as Riffusion morphed from one sound to another, what Roach calls "crate digging in latent space".

Digging through releases on Bandcamp brings up numerous artists using AI tools in the months since Riffusion launched, some merely presenting the raw outputs, and others using them more creatively. Prolific North Wales based experimenter Simon Proffitt issued a clutch of Riffusion-derived albums this spring under the name safetensors. On *WRONG*, he fed it text prompts geared towards visual, rather than sonic results, generating shimmeringly benign yet eerily suspended ambiences. Its companion release *RIGHT* found the same tracks transformed through MIDI instruments into intriguingly directionless melodic tangles.

Elsewhere, Katowice polymath Wojciech Kucharczyk continued his *Fake Scores* series, using unspecified AI tools for *The Grow*, the soundtrack to an imagined horror film about AI-enhanced plants. Oakland's Robbie Grey (aka Fluorescent Grey) did similar for *THTHNG: Desolation Unknown*, his and Kelly Porter's AI-powered homage to John Carpenter's *The Thing*, generating the score from a dataset of Ennio Morricone's original music. For both, the woozy, VHS quality and faltering grip upon musical conventions of AI-born material provides an enticing portal to the uncanny.

Yet the quest for algorithmic perfection continues. Described in a paper at the start of the year and currently open for users to generate short trial clips and send feedback, Google's MusicLM claims greater accuracy to each text prompt and better audio resolution than Mubert or Riffusion. On testing it myself, I found that it still struggled with genre. A prompt for doom metal elicited jaunty country rock, although it had a fair stab when I requested a Baroque hornpipe. Results still converged towards the same 4/4 electronic pop favoured by the sample-assembling tools. The software was trained upon audio/text pairings overseen by music experts – a tactic that promises more for selecting by established musical parameters than by anyone hoping to sonify more abstract concepts.

Perhaps inevitably, the more we teach AI models about how music should sound, the less likely they are to surprise us. Maybe there are better prospects for leaping beyond the rules in improvisation, where parrying with a virtual partner has long been a goal of musicians, George E Lewis's 1980s software Voyager being an early breakthrough. While such tools have yet to reach far beyond academic and computing settings, access to programming languages such as Max can bring them closer.

This year saw the culmination of the FluCoMa (Fluid Corpus Manipulation) project, a five year effort to create a set of open source modular tools for use within Max, SuperCollider and Pure Data. Coded by a team led by the University of Huddersfield's Pierre Alexandre Tremblay and honed through contributions from musicians including Lauren Sarah Hayes and Leafcutter John, FluCoMa will bamboozle those seeking an off the shelf app, but its use of machine listening and machine learning to classify, manipulate and remix large banks of sounds offers rich potential for crafting bespoke improvisational tools. And if there's one constant so far in the story of music and AI, it's that a human touch is the vital component. ●

Jadwiga Janowska

McKenzie Wark, and *Someone Who Isn't Me*, an autobiographical Divine Comedy reimagining by Geoff Rickly, singer in post-hardcore band Thursday. Both are astonishingly wry and lyrical, at least partially set in New York City, and ask how music and substances create a sense of – and a dangerous need for – what Wark defines as ongoingness, "wanting the story to have another season". I imagine I'll be thinking about them both for a long time.

Lara C Cory
This year, everything seemed to fall at the extreme ends of the spectrum, city versus country, mainstream versus experimental, masculine versus feminine, horror versus joy. 2023 gave me the full experience.

I witnessed Miloš Forman's *Amadeus* accompanied by the Academy of St Martin in the Fields at London's Royal Albert Hall. I enjoyed the raw intensity of Oxbow's show at Studio 9294 in Hackney Wick. And I felt the joyful energy of Schoenberg, Glazunov and Dvorak performed by British violist Lawrence Power and his world-class friends in a church in Hambledon.

When it came to indoor fun, I finally got around to reading Jeffrey Eugenides' *Virgin Suicides* and Cormac McCarthy's *Blood Meridian*, and I'd say Juel Taylor's *They Cloned Tyrone*, Ti West's *Pearl* and George Pavlour's *Rawhead Rex* were worthy of a night in.

Raymond Cummings
This year I wrapped myself up in an astonishing number of books, mostly detective fiction: Ed McBain, John D MacDonald, Dennis Lehane, James Lee Burke, the entire bibliography of George Pelecanos. It was as though the wider world was a raw, twitching nerve and lurid, visceral fables were what I needed to survive. And there was wonderful music, too, of course: Animal Collective's stoned *Isn't It Now?*; Yo La Tengo's marvellous *This Stupid World*; a tranche of live Autechre sets from 2022; irradiated balm courtesy of Sofia Kourtesis and Catherine Christer Hennix; and much more besides. There's always time for Alice Coltrane. I attended a wedding in Memphis, watching the sun set along the Mississippi River, and spaced out on languid ferries crisscrossing Puget Sound, and sat quietly nearby as my son worked on his first college application in Texas. With my friend Thom, I visited MOMA in New York City for the first time. I phone-interviewed Marc Masters about his book *High Bias*; we've known one another for years, yet it was our first conversation. I fell in love with a vibrant, brilliant woman, and together we saw *Oppenheimer* twice in theatres. I checked more Frederick Wiseman documentaries off my watchlist. I made it through.

Tim Fish
Earlier this year I became a father for the first time and so during the months that followed, my cultural experiences were beyond scarce. With that said, amid the Netflix binges and midnight nappy changes, I did manage to devote two hours of my time to Laura Poitras's stunning documentary *All The Beauty And The Bloodshed*. The film offers up a double dose of interest, as on the one hand it stands as a biopic of the inimitable photographer and activist Nan Goldin, while also documenting her crusade against the Sackler family, who are one of the main architects of America's opioid crisis.

As the title suggests, Poitras manages to capture the heartache and sorrow that often lingered in the background of Goldin's life and work, as well as the feelings of joy and liberation that bubbled up in the queer communities where she found solace. Goldin's activism against the Sackler family was ultimately successful, as the art world – eventually – turned their back on the vast amount of blood money they had accepted in funding and donations. So a happy ending of sorts, with the entire film serving as a masterclass in maintaining the courage in your convictions.

Francis Gooding
These days it's quite unusual for me to listen to a record over and over again, but I have spent 2023 with the transubstantiated dope talk of Stove God Cooks permanently on repeat – both 2020's *Reasonable Drought* and the officially unreleased follow-up *If These Kitchen Walls Could Talk* are simply magnificent rap records. I spent a long time with electric Miles; I came late to a full appreciation of those records, and they still make me feel as though I haven't caught up. My book of the year was Olga Tokarczuk's *Drive Your Plow Over The Bones Of The Dead*, hands down, with an honourable mention for *Aurochs And Auks*, a collection of sharp essays on extinction by John Burnside. Moki Cherry at London's ICA was a treat, as was a stunning show of Val Wilmer's photographs at Worldly Wicked & Wise gallery in Queen's Park, London. Musically, Kahil El'Zabar's tribute to Moki's partner Don Cherry at Hackney's Church Of Sound was really something special, not least because their daughter Neneh blessed the proceedings.

Kurt Gottschalk
Two very different and very memorable concerts this year both brought me into homes – not the artists' homes but fictional ones. *Interbeing II* – a concert-length piece performed by the ensemble TAK at DiMenna Center in Manhattan in October – was welcoming and inviting, with the performers sitting together at a table, later on a large sofa, a video of them preparing meals and food and tea made from ingredients foraged around composer Eric Wubbels's Massachusetts home served to the audience. Object Collection's HOUSECONCERT, staged at The Brick in Brooklyn through May, was altogether more unsettling, with ritual, formality, games, magic tricks, unending prep and an unhinged punk band all creating the feeling of a party one would rather not be at. It was uncannily unnerving, something at which the dystopic musical theatre troupe excels. My happiest surprise of 2023 was *Once Within A Time*, a film by Godfrey Reggio with music by Philip Glass. The two worked together on the *Koyaanisqatsi* films but this bore little resemblance. It was a vivid, funny, surprising, heartfelt, doomsday prophecy. It showed for a week at the Museum of Modern Art in the autumn, and by the third screening I obsessively attended, it all made perfect sense.

Louise Gray
Listen to small sounds and you gain a universe. This is my continuing experience of Éliane Radigue's acoustic *OCCAM* works. Two ensemble works (one, *OCCAM Hexa V*, co-authored with Carol Robinson) at the Fondation Cartier in Paris point the way forward to mesmerizing futures. Being part of film maker Aura Satz's small crew for *OCCAM Delta XX* in Swansea (Rhodri Davies and Julia Eckhardt played, while *Wire* pal Jo Hutton did the sound recording) was thrilling: being so close up to the swarm of sounds was mind altering. If you detect a blip where the light I was holding goes momentarily out of phase, it's because I nearly swooned at Eckhardt's feet. As a trustee of eavesdropping, the new music platform founded and curated by soprano Juliet Fraser, I am partisan. That said, this year's festival – Lucy Railton, NikNak, Silvia Tarozzi, and more – was a celebration of much needed connection and creativity. Two huge exhibitions – the Royal Academy's Marina Abramović retrospective and Tate Britain's Women In Revolt! – emphasise the importance of attention and participation, making the implicit point that political change comes from listening to one another and the other. Amid such violence, I must cling on to this with hope.

George Grella
"When the world is running down/You make the best of what's still around". Against the odds, I managed to listen – in part or in full – to around 600 new and archival releases this year. There were dozens of hours of music that renewed the past, asked provocative questions, and opened up paths to the future. And there were many times more hours of music that, even when technically skilled, centred an egotistical self-satisfaction. There should be no room for this in things like avant garde and experimental music making (and critical thinking), but as human endeavours they are limited by their participants. On a global scale, we seem to be running toward a dangerous collision between technological utopianism and atavism, and I have little confidence that the increasingly pat cliches of things like noise music and field recordings and free improvisation are any kind of way out. They have the façade of engagement but are solipsistic, perhaps pointing out a danger while in the end retreating to safety. Only the few very privileged are truly safe in this world, the rest of us have a moral and ethical obligation to confront aesthetic and philosophical danger, and overcome.

David Grundy
Going to Eddie Prévost's workshop and Wandelweiser's Klangraum, both, in their different ways, reminders of music and community. Elaine Mitchener in Maxwell-Davies's *Eight Songs For A Mad King* and Will Liverman in Henze's *El Cimmarón* at London's Wigmore Hall: voices stretched, contorted, speaking out. Quiet revelation from Eva-Maria Houben, with Artur Vidal and Huw Morgan in a church tucked between skyscrapers, and

Back to the Land

Julian Cope's mapping of sacred sites across Britain has provided the blueprint for numerous contemporary artists to find new sources of ancient energy

By Louis Pattison

Frankie Insley in Me Lost Me's "Festive Day" video

In the years since its publication, Julian Cope's 1998 book *The Modern Antiquarian* has attained mythic status. An energetic travelogue of megalithic sites across the British Isles, it's long out of print, with secondhand copies going for a healthy three figures on eBay. A formal reprint has not been forthcoming, but Head Heritage has marked its 25th anniversary with *Cope's Notes #5*, a mini-memoir in which Cope recounts its writing. As he began the research process, he recognised he was no expert. but no one else seemed much interested, and his visits to ancient cairns, barrows and stone circles had filled this rock star with a holy zeal. "From stomping the London streets in black leather on the prowl for espressos to navigating some ancient hollow way for the promise of a lost rugged stone altar at its conclusion," writes Cope, "I felt a fire inside that I'd never before encountered."

The Modern Antiquarian was an outlier in its day, but today, a lot of people are thinking like Cope, the influence of the island's ancestral history casting a long shadow across British culture at large. Film and literature are in the grip of folk horror, a subgenre focused on folklore, isolation and the notion that something evil might be buried in the soil.

Elsewhere, musicians are unearthing old folk traditions, often with a progressive or subversive twist. The London folk troupe Shovel Dance Collective revive work songs and sea shanties that shed light on the working class or queer experience often written out of the historical record. For the video to "Festive Day", from her album *RPG*, Me Lost Me recruited the choreographer Frankie Insley, who performed a dance in the Cotswold Morris tradition against a backdrop of 3D-modelled shapes and crashing waves. The boutique label Folklore Tapes continue to release beautifully packaged vinyl interpreting folk traditions and tales from Lancashire, Devon and Somerset, while some drew direct influence from Cope's work – working as Stonecirclesampler, Luke Murray cribbed samples from the TV special of *The Modern Antiquarian* and spliced them into jungle breaks to make bizarre rave mixtapes.

One of the key sites Cope identified in *The Modern Antiquarian* is Avebury. A gigantic henge and stone circle dating back to the third millennium BC, the site made such an impression on Cope he insisted journalists interviewing him about 1992's *Peggy Suicide* trekked out to Wiltshire to meet him at the stones. Cope is far from the only cultural figure to perceive something special in Avebury. In 1971 Derek Jarman filmed the Super-8 film *A Journey To Avebury*, later scored by both Coil and Throbbing Gristle. In March this year, an iPhone remake of *A Journey To Avebury* shot by the film maker Stanley Schtinter for the purge.xxx label played on location at Avebury, accompanied by a new score of stark sound design by Congolese-Belgian producer Nkisi.

What does a stone circle sound like? Another figure trying to answer that question in 2023 was Oliver Ho. Best known for the brutalist industrial techno of Broken English Club, in September Ho reactivated the long dormant pseudonym Veil for a new album titled *A Circle In Stone*. Today based in Wiltshire, he first visited Avebury as a teenager and says he's returned many times, once staying overnight. "These megalithic sites represent something profound," he tells me by email. "They represent human beings wanting to express something existential, something ineffable and greater than the mere finite Earth." The album's string scrapes and stark, hewn drones feel – much like Avebury itself – primordial and mysterious. "The music was the result of this place speaking to me in some ancient language that only I could understand," continues Ho. "I allowed myself to become a translator of sorts, to transcribe what this place wanted to say."

We live in a time in which the familiar is being uprooted. The increasing unaffordability of metropolitan life is pushing artists out of cities and into the countryside. The climate crisis has prompted us to reconsider our relationship with the natural world. Accordingly, 2023 has seen a number of stand-out releases rooted in a deep engagement with the history of our landscape. *Ridgeway*, a collection of pieces by the Oxford born composer Kate Moore, draws inspiration from the Ridgeway National Trail, a 5000 year old path that starts at Avebury and heads east, passing the giant white horse of Uffington that graces the album's cover. Ghost Box co-founder Jim Jupp's The Belbury Poly returned with *The Path*, a faerie-filled psychedelic folk album featuring the author and poet Justin Hopper, which the pair first conceptualised while walking the South Downs Way. Shirley Collins's swansong *Archangel Hill* concluded with a title track that found her reciting a nostalgic poem about the Sussex landscape written by her father, set to a field recording that her collaborator Ian Kearey captured atop the summit the title refers to, Mount Caburn. The way this music winds together memory and myth, place and personal history can be affecting and profound.

The closest we get to a new edition of *The Modern Antiquarian* today is *Weird Walk. Weird Walk* started as an irregular folklore zine, but has since blossomed into a broader enterprise, with the hardback book *Weird Walk: Wanderings And Wonderings Through The British Ritual Year* now on shelves. This year *Weird Walk* also threw a couple of shows headlined by Jane Weaver's ambient pop group Fenella under the banner Leyline – the name a reference to the venues' locations along the St Michael Line, a vector connecting sacred sites across Cornwall and Devon.

Talk of leylines – the 20th century antiquarian Alfred Watkins's concept that ancient surveyors plotted their monuments along lines of 'earth energy' – may set off some more rationalist readers' woo alarm. But *Weird Walk*'s editors make a bold case for a bit of magickal thinking. "For us, the pathway to a more optimistic future must include re-enchantment," they write. Whether you believe in magic, or you might just benefit from the revitalising effect of a schlep through the countryside, we could probably all gain from taking a leaf out of Cope's book. ●

with Jukka-Pekka Kervinen in a near empty jazz club, accompanied by a sudden rain shower through an open door. Christian Wolff's lush stringencies, inside another cavernous church. The poetry of Candace Hill, dancing with the energies of the music. Jason Moran and Wadada Leo Smith playing outside in a freak September heatwave, notes burning like the sun and burnished like the shade. Getting lost in the corridors of the opera house, frantically trying to find the way in. The silence after the last notes of Mahler's ninth, conducted by Simon Rattle. A blood red moon in Berg's *Wozzeck*. George Walker and Kaija Saariaho retrospectives at London's South Bank. Kofi Agawu on African music. The tympani in Xenakis. György Kúrtág condensing history into the space of a second, a choked instrumental whisper. Cecil Taylor and Min Tanaka on screen, the verges of embrace. And then the events in the face of which music falls away. The ethnic cleansing in Gaza. The silence and the silencing. Perhaps music most of all here, even in its absence, on the marches for Palestine: the movement on the street, the voices upraised.

Andy Hamilton
2023 began depressingly, and hasn't improved – but art can always console. My album of the year is Mike Baggetta's *Everywhen We Go* (Big Ego), featuring mike watt and Jim Keltner – a post-rock power trio of visionary inventiveness and creativity. Baggetta began his career in jazz, moving through improv, and his current feedback-laden sound is freighted with the instrument's history. A very recent discovery, in a similar genre, are The Shredz. They've existed for a decade and made several albums, but new release *Orbit* was the first I'd heard – hypnotic, and potentiating the contrasting virtues of jazz and rock. Trumpeter John-Dennis Renken is in the Miles Davis tradition, while polymathic bassist John Eckhardt sustains a throbbing pulse. It's a contemporary classic, state of the electric art.

Other artists that caught my attention this year included David Virelles and Taiko Saito. Two reissues must be classics – Max Roach's remarkable *Members Don't Get Weary* and Pharoah Sanders's wonderful *Live At Fabrik*. Finally, the biennial Ostrava Music Days in the Czech Republic is an incredible event for lovers of contemporary composition – founder Petr Kotik always thinks big, demands a lot from musicians and richly rewards his audiences.

Miloš Hroch
I cared about music journalism as much as I cared about music. With Bandcamp's anticipated downfall, the music environment became more vulnerable. The platformisation of music distribution has affected music journalism – and the creative class in general – and we witnessed layoffs in some major publications here or shrinking space for music coverage there. Established music editors could overnight find themselves in the same precarious situation as freelancers without contracts, left to work more jobs at once and battling with lack of time. Despite the conditions, we could still find much exciting writing – hail to the survivors!

In autumn I landed in Krakow for a three month literary residency. It was the right season for experimental music in the city, with the thrilling Unsound festival and Sacrum Profanum focused on modern composition. Inspired by the Finders Keepers label reissue of Andrzej Korzyński's score for the 1972 avant garde horror film *Diabeł*, I embarked on a marathon of Polish director Andrzej Żuławski's movies, most of them banned until the fall of communism. The 1989 existentialist sci-fi saga *On The Silver Globe* was a mind-altering experience! One proof that the greatest music criticism is not solely about sounds is Ian Penman's *Fassbinder: Thousands Of Mirrors*, a critical essay on Germany's provocative film maker. The veteran *NME* writer leads you from Walter Benjamin over Oktoberfest to Amon Düül and Neue Deutsche Welle. It's wild and focused read.

Jo Hutton
It was a year of inspiring new festivals, including this year's MaerzMusik in Berlin, headlined by Elaine Mitchener and featuring Nandita Kumar's beautiful printing press sound art installation at the Daad-gallerie. Cheslav Singh's multimedia *Lightsounds* weekend at London's Rich Mix revealed new audiovisual works including Marti Guillem's incredible lightbulb operated synthesizer, with a life of its own. Another Sky festival directed by Sam Salem and Emily Moore, programmed work by SWANA artists, including Mazen Kerbaj, Egyptian electroacoustic icon Halim El Dabh, and poignant Palestinian films by Kamal Aljafari, among others, that predated the current war by just one week. That was a particularly harsh synchronicity of politics overshadowing art.

Some significant deaths – especially Kajia Saariaho, Carla Bley and Javier Álvarez – led me down a nostalgic road of discovery through Sound And Music's *Recovery/ Discovery* album featuring Jonathan Harvey, Mira Calix, Javier Álvarez and Harrison Birtwistle, and to Saariaho's posthumous release of choral recordings.

Lary 7's retrospective album *Larynx* was a real eye-opener for me with his ingenious instrument building. 2023 was, overall, turntablist Mariam Rezaei's year for well-deserved accolades, especially for new album *Bown*. Finally, *The Fierce Urgency Of Now* (Fischlin, Heble, Lipsitz), a book picked up at *The Wire*'s stall at lovely Iklectik's Iklectika summer book fair, has transformed my thinking about free improvisation.

Biba Kopf
2023 kicked in proper with a February trip to Berlin for In Memoriam Manuel Göttsching, a celebration of the wonderful man and musician who died on 4 December 2022, aged 70. The year ended with the big upset of the Iklectik venue being evicted, along with other tenants of a rare oasis of farmland green and pastures new near London's Waterloo station. Many stimulating nights spent there, not the least being a series of Black Industrial | Noise events including talks with Neil Kulkarni and Dhangsha, Dubmorphology with Trevor Mathison and Gary Stewart, Ain Bailey, and more. Other great nights out: various Elaine Mitchener performances crowned by her participation in choreographer Dam Van Hunyh's *Re:Birth* at London's The Place. More listening pleasures: the usual suspects Laura Ortman (Kopf's album of the year), Mamer, Lao Dan, Zafka, and there would have been much else besides from China, had I managed to get to Shenzhen's Tomorrow festival, reactivated post-Covid in June. I compensated with some grand nights out at Hong Kong's Broadway Cinematheque, including the Morricone documentary *Ennio* and a new print of Taiwanese director Hou Hsiao-hsien's *City Of Sadness*. Finally, 82 year old Bob Dylan's endless touring continued to surprise, this time with five Grateful Dead covers, "Stella Blue" among them, across a run of European dates.

Neil Kulkarni
I was on the last train back from London Euston to Coventry in late September when I got the strangest feeling, a feeling I've never had before in my life. It was a faint sense of belonging. It had been engendered earlier that evening at Iklectik in Waterloo, where I had conducted a Q&A with Dhangsha, an experimental sound artist and producer who I'd first heard on the *Disruptive Frequencies* compilation, a collection of experimental noise and electronic music made exclusively by BAME artists. Even at the album's launch night, 'we' were outnumbered by a traditional and overwhelmingly white audience. In Iklectik, strange things happened. I saw Trevor Mathison there, I chatted with Dhangsha, I felt a genuine sense of finding a home, of belonging. Compliments which I would normally shrink in revulsion from became things I sipped from, enjoyed, because they were being given to me by people who looked like me, people who had lived lives akin to mine. I am a different person as 2023 closes because it genuinely feels as if I've glimpsed a place I can be, a place I can stay. Black noise, brown noise is here and it's only going to get louder. I hope I can be a part of people hearing it.

Dave Mandl
After finally upgrading my ragged home sound system and digital library to something more respectable this year, my weekly hours spent listening to recorded music and radio in glorious high fidelity skyrocketed, but at the expense of seeing live shows. Among the meagre concert highlights for me were the John Zorn 70th birthday fest at Roulette, Jennifer Choi & Les Frères Méduses providing live accompaniment to the 1927 Tod Browning film *The Unknown* (also at Roulette), singer-songwriter Simon Joyner performing in a low key house concert setting in Bushwick, Genesis tribute band The Musical Box doing a flawless reproduction of *The Lamb Lies Down On Broadway*, and Sunwatchers playing on a boat circling Manhattan Island. Music on film highs were documentaries on Pauline Oliveros (*Deep Listening: The Story Of Pauline Oliveros*) and legendary design firm Hipgnosis (*Squaring The Circle*). The King Crimson doc *In The Court Of The Crimson King*, only sparsely screened in the US, has continued to elude me as I

write this. My own music activities included being proud papa to new releases from my groups Time Trout and Emergency Group, the former also doing a delightful mini-tour of the UK. My WFMU radio show *It's Complicated* continues to promulgate the best of prog rock and its offshoots to believers and sceptics alike. Honourable mention: career-spanning retrospectives on Harry Smith (at the Whitney) and Ed Ruscha (at the Museum of Modern Art).

Peter Margasak

I've never felt the disjunction between the nourishing power of sound and the doom of the planet more viscerally than this past year. I count myself as extraordinarily lucky to have the life I do, surrounded by music, but that doesn't diminish the horror of watching the world crater to unadulterated greed and cruelty. We do what we can to fight it, so I've never been more grateful to artists pushing in spite of the madness. Whether it was Henry Threadgill maintaining child-like curiosity and joy in his creative life – and the masterful telling of his own journey in *Easily Slip Into Another World: A Life In Music*, which is far more than an autobiography or mere music book – or composer Cassandra Miller continuing to find haunting, instinctual melodies that elide any tradition or practice, the true seekers brought necessary beauty and rapture in 2023. Of course, there was so much more that touched me, such as the ecstatic thrill of Evan Parker melding into Joshua Abrams' Natural Information Society or finally hearing Anna Högberg Attack tear it down on stage, but I remain deeply grateful for those who continue soldiering on in the face of hate.

Ryan Meehan

My concertgoing in 2023 struck the contrast between the rainwater serenity of La Monte Young and Charles Curtis's *Just Charles* at New York's Peter Freeman Gallery and the silly-putty tesseraction of prog jam megagang Taper's Choice at Union Pool. Esther Yi's debut novel *Y/N* charted the oblique and darkly funny descent of a K-pop fan beyond obsession into twilight; for me, McKenzie Wark's autotheory diary *Raving* reclaimed the dancefloor and the city as spaces for militant thinking. In a programme at New York Film Festival that also featured the last film by Godard, I saw works by two living masters: *Man In Black*, Wang Bing's transfixing portrait of dissident Chinese composer Wang Xilin; and Pedro Costa's baroque, haunted musical triptych *Daughters Of Fire*. I also mourned the passing of the great painter Brice Marden. But the most consequential works of artistic labour and expression this year have been the strikes among screenwriters and screen actors and cultural workers – their demands being for honest wages and for dignity. And a newspaper with the names of Palestinian children killed throughout October, printed by Writers Against The War On Gaza, and distributed in the lobby of *The New York Times*.

Bill Meyer

When reflecting on 2022, I noted how much I kept my head down. This year, I made up for it by travelling to Knoxville, Kongsberg, and Berlin to attend music festivals. Closer to home, the Frequency Festival finally brought French microtonal composer Pascale Criton's music to Chicago, the Hyde Park Jazz Festival's programming eclipsed the Chicago Jazz Festival's, and the Chicago Humanities Festival brought the sound and light of La Monte Young and Marian Zazeela's *The Second Dream Of The High-Tension Line Stepdown Transformer* to the Midwest for the first time ever. In between the big events, I attended as many concerts as I could in Chicago. The city's improvisational community is going through a productive phase of cross-generational exchange and new growth, and my favourite local live experience has been the periodic appearances by Ari Brown's marvellous, as yet unrecorded trio with Joshua Abrams and Mike Reed. Daniel Bachman, Liam Grant and the members of The Bill Orcutt Guitar Quartet have all kept guitars interesting. And when I stepped back from sounds, Roscoe Mitchell's massive and colourful Keeper Of The Code: Paintings 1963–2022 at Corbett Vs Dempsey and Remedios Varo: Science Fictions at the Art Institute Chicago each recalibrated my vision.

Antonio Poscic

Creating and enjoying art can be a solitary experience, but this year I gravitated towards forms with a strong communal character. This is key to both Slovenian capital Ljubljana's Sonica and Croatian capital Zagreb's ZEZ, two relatively small festivals that have felt like cosy gatherings of friends from across the world. Hanging out with Sonica co-organiser Jaša Bužinel and Lucrecia Dalt collaborator Alex Lázaro, unwinding on the dance floor with Nihiloxica and getting lost in Félicia Atkinson's hazy reverberations were just a few of the year's countless lovely, memorable moments. Some of my favourite albums, Aho Ssan's *Rhizomes*, Ziúr's *Eyeroll* and Armand Hammer's *We Buy Diabetic Test Strips*, also built on the idea of networks and camaraderie, resulting in music that felt huge in scope, and warm and intimate in execution. Similarly, Justin Benson and Aaron Moorhead's cosmic horror filmography was always partly about friendship, but their latest work *Something In The Dirt* – my favourite film of the year alongside Bertand Mandico's psychedelic queer sci-fi *After Blue* – takes this metaphor the furthest.

To wrap up the year, I had the pleasure of seeing my students from the Academy of Music in Zagreb perform their superb live coding and algorithmic pieces at ZEZ x KONTEJNER's Izložba Zvuka exhibition.

Emily Pothast

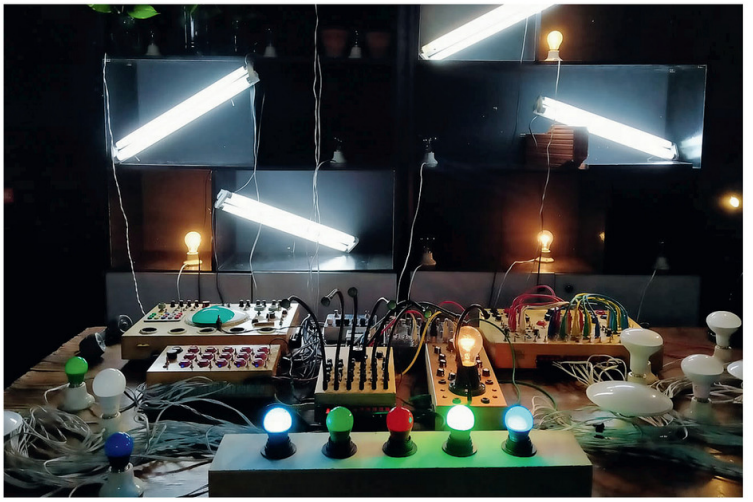
Seven years ago, the Ghost Ship warehouse fire claimed the lives of 36 artists and underground music fans – the deadliest fire in the history of Oakland, California. The effect on the local scene was extremely traumatic, highlighting the value of a strong communal ethos for collective survival. This influence persists today – in my 2022 profile of Ratskin Records (*The Wire* 457), label heads Sharmi Basu and Michael Daddona discuss how music scenes can provide "chosen family".

Over the past year, my appreciation for the East Bay creative community has only deepened. World class artists who have long made Oakland their home, including Spellling, Chuck Johnson, Marielle Jakobsons and Zachary James Watkins (whose new band Foreign Domestic are excellent) continue to do outstanding work here, while emerging artists like S'hells Gate, Agnes Martian and Zekarias Musele Thompson (whose many wonderful collaborations include the improv trio Rewards Program with Miles Lassi and Skyway Man) are circular-breathing new life into the scene. Collectives and venues like Working Name Studios, Cone Shape Top, Eternal Now and The Crown hold space for both artistry and activism, contributing to the feeling that Oakland is in the midst of a very special creative renaissance.

Edwin Pouncey

A personal 2023 highlight was an exhibition of my *Worx On Paper* that was shown at Céline gallery in Glasgow. Made up of a carefully curated selection of original drawings and sketchbooks, the pieces were displayed in vitrines and under perspex on undecorated

Marti Guillem's lightbulb operated synthesizer



Marti Guillem

Alan Skidmore at Cafe Oto, London

walls that gave the feeling that the room was absorbing the images on display. The show looked magnificent, the energy was electrifying and those who attended the private view were wonderful. Thanks to Roísin, Adam and Michael for making this happen. Special gigs included Wizz Jones at Ivy House, Nunhead, Aurora Orchestra's Stravinsky at the Royal Albert Hall and especially Rain Parade, Barbara Manning and Bridget St John, all of whom gave stellar performances at the Betsey Trotwood pub in Clerkenwell, London.

Lots to read this year, but two books that stand out are John Szwed's *Cosmic Scholar*, his masterful biography of artist, collector, producer and magician Harry Smith, together with Will Hermes' *Lou Reed: The King Of New York*, a definitive study about the life (and death) of one of rock music's most important and unpredictable artists – having ploughed through nearly everything that has been written about the man and his music over the years (most of which have since been consigned to charity shops) this one is finally the keeper.

Mosi Reeves

Harry Belafonte, who passed away in April, was a familial presence for generations of Americans. His calypso classics like "Jump In The Line (Shake, Senora)" and "Day-O (The Banana Boat Song)" garlanded countless films and TV soundtracks. Hiphop fans remember that he helped produce one of the first cinematic depictions of the culture, 1984's *Beat Street*. In recent years, he became a living embodiment of the Civil Rights era, sharing experiences of his friendship with Dr Martin Luther King, Jr for young people unfamiliar with that turbulent period in history.

Yet the one moment I returned to upon news of his passing is *Odds Against Tomorrow*, a 1959 Hollywood crime film he starred in and financed through his company HarBel Productions. The film finds Belafonte's character drawn into a robbery scheme alongside Robert Ryan's bigoted ex-soldier and Ed Begley's disgraced ex-police officer. More than director Robert Wise's noirish black and white atmospherics or composer John Lewis's haunting jazz soundtrack, it's Belafonte's inchoate rage that burns the hottest. Blacklisted screenwriter Abraham Polonsky conjured up reasons for his disquiet such as a gambling problem, life as a middling cocktail musician, and an inability to connect with his ex-wife and daughter.

But Belafonte's anger in *Odds Against Tomorrow* seems to come from a deeper place, something that can't be solved through unfulfilled bromides about equal rights. Sadly, the character's unresolved bitterness at a world not made for him and the explosive violence he helps set into motion feel too timely today.

Ilia Rogatchevski

My daughter turned five this year, which means that she now dictates what gets blasted out of the speakers. Thankfully, her tastes are rather mature for her age. In January, I put on REM's *Green* on a car trip through Edinburgh and since then she has become infatuated with "Pop Song 89". It has been the soundtrack to our year.

I saw many great gigs in 2023, but Fever Ray at Field Day comes out on top. I never managed to catch The Knife when they were still going, so seeing Karin Dreijer perform made me very happy. I also saw Aphex Twin, but despite being a fan since high school, his set made me want to crawl into a foetal position and cry into my overpriced beer.

Another thing I ticked off my bucket list was visiting the Denge sound mirrors in Kent. These concrete structures were built in the 1920s and designed as early warning systems to detect the sound of oncoming enemy aircraft. They were made obsolete by radar and now stand idle in a disused gravel quarry. It's like Stonehenge, but for hairy tourists in Sunn O))) T-shirts.

Dave Segal

The year's most sublime concert was by spiritual improv ensemble Natural Information Society; sadly, the scintillating set occurred before about 50 people in a 1000 capacity Seattle venue. All of which made me embarrassed to be a citizen of this supposedly highly cultured city. That fiasco was somewhat redeemed by a sold-out show by A Frames, a legendary Seattle post-punk trio who resurfaced after a seven year hiatus to remind us of the power of minimalism, sculpted noise and hilariously dystopian lyrics. Full of acute musical and sociopolitical observations, Mudhoney guitarist Steve Turner's memoir *Mud Ride* wittily subverted long-held perceptions about grunge and music biz hype. In the pantheon of tomes about record labels, Matthew Goody's *Needles & Plastic: Flying Nun Records 1981–1988* is likely unparalleled for maniacal attention to detail and sleuthing about a crucial underground rock scene. Kenneth Thomas's film documentary *It Came From Aquarius Records* portrayed why exceptional record shops are as close as capitalism comes to cultivating sacred spaces. Toby Amies's surprisingly funny and moving doc *In The Court Of The Crimson King* shed revelatory light on Robert Fripp, the charming tyrant and maddening perfectionist who has guided UK prog's headiest group through multifarious line-up and stylistic changes, proving that confusion just might be his epitaph.

Stewart Smith

This year Mariam and I got married and it was the best day of my life: a Geordie-Iranian-Scottish celebration of love, community and music. A few weeks before that we attended Italy's Ground Festival, watching Rob Mazurek and Damon Locks playing under the stars: a memory to cherish. I had the privilege of travelling to several festivals around Europe this year, all of which yielded magical experiences: an incredible performance from Dewa Alit's Gamelan Salukat in Bergen's medieval Håkonshallen, the joyous energy of Fendika and Paal Nilssen-Love's EthioBraz in Oslo, Lasse Marhaug's wildly psychedelic multi-screen audiovisual installation at Only Connect in Trondheim, Fabrizio Saiu's soundwalk in the forests of Lombardy, Ahmed Ag Kaedy and Will Guthrie's spry Tuareg blues on a Finnish island, Jean Herve-Peron playing his cement mixer with an international ensemble of improvisors at Moers, Mette Rasmussen and Julien Deprez pushing an ad hoc ensemble into ferocious ecstasy at Meteo. Closer to home, Usurper's funny and tender farewell in Edinburgh. I've also enjoyed playing music again, inspired by the fortuitous combination of an agreeably tactile and noisy Tiesco guitar, a nifty sleeved bolt left over from some flatpack furniture, and my brilliant colleagues and students at Newcastle University.

Daniel Spicer

I enjoyed many fine live musical performances this year: Moor Mother's remarkable *Jazz Codes* suite at London's Barbican; Irreversible Entanglements' deep cosmic jazz in the

Yuka Fujii

post-apocalyptic crumble of Hackney's EartH; Shakti's farewell at the Hammersmith Apollo; the supremely swinging Coltrane tribute at Cafe Oto featuring Alan Skidmore; Sloth Racket blazing at Brighton's Rose Hill. Big-up, too, to the Moki Cherry exhibition at the ICA and Kahil El'Zabar's accompanying musical presentation. A couple of music-related films generated some heat: Toby Amies's wildly entertaining *In The Court Of The Crimson King*, charting 50 years of King Crimson; and Aaron Trinder's *Free Party: A Folk History* on the late 1980s/early 90s UK underground rave scene, which brought tears to this old raver's eyes. New books: the amphetamine enthusiasm of Peter Stampfel's *Stampfel On Weber And The Complete Boston Broadsides 1964–67*; Ted Berrigan's collected prose – engrossing letters, reviews, etc – in the terrific *Get The Money*; selected poems, journals and ephemera by John Weiners in the sensitively compiled *Solitary Pleasure*; and the most righteously uplifting, optimistic and hopeful blast of speculative utopian fiction in *Everything For Everyone: An Oral History Of The New York Commune 2052–2072* by ME O'Brien and Eman Abdelhadi.

Joseph Stannard

First, the bullshit. An endless flow of uninspired ambient music; the relentless churn of superhero media; narcissists of all stripes; continually neglecting to renew my passport; the lack of decent horror cinema criticism; that disappointing 'new' Beatles single; extortionately priced high rise apartment blocks gradually blotting out the sky in my neighbourhood; shocking mainstream media bias regarding the situation in Gaza. Now, the good shit. The return of Position Normal; stunning live sets by The Dream Syndicate, AR Kane, GAIKA, Devin Townsend, Godflesh, Dez Dare, Hawkwind and Voivod; exceptional films from Robbie Banfitch (*The Outwaters*), Kyle Edward Ball (*Skinamarink*), Dutch Marich (*Horror In The High Desert 2: Minerva*), Stephen Cognetti (*Hell House LLC Origins: The Carmichael Manor*), Lee Cronin (*Evil Dead Rise*) and Quentin Dupieux (*Smoking Causes Coughing*); finally seeing E Elias Merhige's *Shadow Of The Vampire* and Peter Weir's *The Last Wave* on the big screen thanks to London's Prince Charles Cinema and *Animus* magazine; the Patreon pages of film maker, musician and cultural commentator Mtume Gant, cartoonist Michael Kupperman and YouTuber Natalie 'Contrapoints' Wynn; rediscovering Manic Street Preachers; the long overdue and highly beneficial deletion of my Twitter account; adventures in and out of the capital with my sweetheart; my two beautiful cats.

Richard Thomas

2023 was an action packed year. Distilling it into a neat paragraph or two is impossible, so arbitrarily here are some of the cultural things I experienced around London: Helen Saunders: Modernist Rebel at Courtauld Gallery was a succinctly curated overview of a major British abstract painter, and one of only two female Vorticist painters. Other exhibitions I enjoyed were People Make Television at Raven Row, Lucien Freud: New Perspectives, After Impressionism – Inventing Modern Art, both at The National Gallery, and the Aubrey Williams collection, Cosmological Abstractions 1973–1985, at Tate Britain. Musically I time travelled twice. Attending Mozart's *Mass In C Minor* at The Proms on a balmy Sunday morning was a vivid and psychedelic encounter with the 18th century imagination. Likewise Vikingur Olafsson's interpretation of Bach's *Goldberg Variations* at the Royal Festival Hall. It was both hysterical and poignant listening to Alan Bennett in droll conversation at the BFI in April. Euripides' *Medea* at Soho Place blew the cobwebs of a muted spring Saturday afternoon away, but I'm not sure I liked the production. With an abundance of brio Michael Frayn's *Noises Off* at The Phoenix Theatre proved that post-Brechtian farce still kicks arse.

Spenser Tomson

I turned 40 this year. Apart from some mild midlife crises (buying a pair of orange trainers, researching chin-ups online, oat milk), and despite the gradually unravelling shitshow that is Planet Earth 2023, I feel lucky to have been alright. Here are my greatest hits: I spent New Year's day looking at Edvard Munch paintings in Oslo (*The Sun* is much better than *The Scream*); in April I walked the West Highland Way and now find myself daydreaming about the astonishing Rannoch Moor almost daily; in June I became obsessed with Chris Watson and the late Philip Jeck's *Oxmardyke*, intoxicated by the sense of absence and loss which seeps through it; recently I've rewatched the "Rix Road" episode of *Andor* ten or 15 times, fantasising about Earthly resistances; I also reread the Adrian Mole books, which are still as funny as I remember and, at 40, provided me with new emotional impacts. Also, discovered that you can now get oat milk delivered to your door, so fuck it.

Rob Turner

Digging into scattered lists on my phone, I see there's an unfestive chill running through my highlights, this year. (I'm gonna blame the geopolitical endtimes.) On screen, *Skinamarink* and *Pearl* were impossible to separate in the fight for 2023's most ghoulish, indelible closing shot. And even the non-horror films that most grabbed me felt like they were hanging out somewhere in the genre's borderlands. Véréna Paravel and Lucien Castaing-Taylor opened up the human body with *De Humani Corporis Fabrica*, and Charlotte Wells mixed joy with dread in *Aftersun*. It was a hell of a year for the Touch label. Jeck and Watson's *Oxmardyke* traced a path from mundane reality down into the churning waters of the afterlife, while Youmna Saba's *Wishah* (Arabic for veil) spun the real tunes from a modified oud and Arabic verse. Elsewhere, I got happily lost in two (madly detailed) replicas of US festivals that took place before I was born: Wattstax 72 and the 12th International Sound Poetry Festival. Josephine Foster's *Domestic Sphere* was magic, and *Baltimore Saturday* the wildest new (old) Jandek CD in a while. Besides wonderful books by Harryette Mullen, Susan Taubes, Pierre Henry and Marc Masters, the writing that truly tore my heart out was *Four Men*, a miniature cataclysm from William Vollmann. ●

Oxmardyke rail crossing, UK

Chris Watson/Touch

Rival Camps

As fan-friendly sites Bandcamp and Discogs fail the communities that made them thrive, the need for genuine independence in music is more urgent than ever

By Britt Brown

To fully grasp the gravity of the sale of independent music distribution website Bandcamp in September 2023, one must flash back to the halcyon crossroads of the mid-2000s. Digital music was still young, accessed as MP3s purchased through iTunes, or pirated files downloaded via the post-Napster network of Limewire, Kazaa, Soulseek, etc. Physical media, though waning, still sold steadily at resilient record shops, small online distributors and self-run artist and label websites.

Bandcamp debuted in December 2007 and initially made little splash. The teenage vibe of its name (matching a contemporaneous *American Pie* spin-off film), flat design and meagre pool of artists didn't seem to herald a seismic shift. But the premise of the site was, and is, brilliant: combining digital and physical music into a single storefront, linked within an ecosystem of labels and artists, in exchange for a ten–15 percent cut. Its ease of use and prompt payouts were immediately appealing. Fans liked being able to sidestep the corporate behemoth of Apple, and musicians liked it because they could set their own prices and get paid accordingly.

By keeping overheads low – Bandcamp had no offices for many years – the site grew gradually more profitable, popular and powerful. In 2013 they launched an app. Then an editorial division. Larger labels and artists set up shop. During the pandemic Bandcamp started hosting live performances, listening parties and Bandcamp Fridays, where once a month they waived their fees to help support artists struggling to make a decent income. The site's ascendancy has been one of the few silver linings on the shrinking iceberg of the music industry.

Which is why the March 2022 news of its sale to North Carolina video game company Epic Games hit like a betrayal. No amount of corporate reassurance could change the fact that one of independent music's last bastions was now, officially, not independent. Miraculously, little changed. However, fans' fears were reawakened in September 2023 when it was announced that Bandcamp was to be sold again, this time to "the largest music licensing company in the world" – a Santa Monica entity called Songtradr (misheard in many a heated exchange as SongTraitor). Their website is rich with business sloganeering: "amplifying brands", "trending tunes", "ROI-driven solutions". One of Songtradr's first moves as new boss was to fire around half of Bandcamp's staff. Their chief marketing officer's explanation for the layoffs made clear that more overhauls were coming: "Based on its current financials, Bandcamp requires some adjustments to ensure a sustainable and healthy company that can serve its community of artists and fans long into the future."

What makes this development of such concern is that, for several years, Bandcamp has not supported the independent music world so much as effectively supplanted it. Thousands of artists and labels that were birthed and bred in its protective matrix have never existed outside of it. Many older, more established artists have shifted operations to Bandcamp and their prior digital infrastructure has lapsed or gone dormant. Many fans, too, have become so habituated to Bandcamp's convenience that they no longer peruse elsewhere.

The site is a one-stop shop for discovery, patronage and playback. Were Bandcamp to be dismantled, either intentionally or via corporate clumsiness, it would be like a mass eviction. Huge swathes of artists would be cast into limbo, their catalogues inaccessible. Various micro-scenes would effectively cease to exist, like vaporwave, dungeon synth, chiptune, fantasy ambient, barber beats, and their various subsets.

But Bandcamp is not the only pillar of the contemporary music landscape wobbling. For most of its lifespan, Discogs has been sedentary to a fault. Launched at the turn of the century for the modest purpose of cataloguing the vinyl of its DJ founder Kevin Lewandowski, the site surged in growth upon introducing a marketplace feature in 2005. It looks almost a relic of an older internet, stark, utilitarian and indifferent to the outside world. Its function as a music-centric eBay has never waned, but over the years the site's role has expanded in unpredictable ways, becoming both stock market and encyclopedia, equally indispensable to appraisers and researchers.

Since fans provide the bulk of its vast listings, administrative changes are often received with unusual hostility. One such change occurred in May, when Discogs increased its transaction fee from eight to nine percent – and, for the first time, applied it to the shipping cost. Given that freight rates worldwide have spiked due to Brexit, energy costs and various other factors, postage is now frequently pricier than the item itself, making the new policy onerous to sellers scraping by on slim margins.

The sense of betrayal echoes the online discussions rippling outward from Bandcamp's sale. These companies were founded on the fandom of their users, and they seeded entire communities and helped support the livelihoods of thousands. Yet these are not public utilities; they owe nothing to anyone, regardless of sweat, effort or artistry. Should the shareholders at Discogs deem it necessary to raise rates even higher, more sellers might migrate elsewhere, and sales might stagnate, but the site's core content would remain – its listings will long outlast those who logged them.

Meanwhile, music streaming giant Spotify's reign is founded on a tenuous alliance. Unsurprisingly, paying artists (less than) pennies is not an effective method of building loyalty. Despite a user base of over half a billion, and 15 years of relentless growth, the company has never been reliably profitable. Spotify's latest attempt to rectify their deficit includes stopping the payment of royalties for tracks which are played fewer than 1000 times in a year, leaving a larger slice of subscription revenue between its most streamed artists. It's an odd logic, one almost cartoonish in its Late Capitalism cruelty: devaluing less popular music in order to pay more to more popular music.

All these ripples confirm time's ancient lesson: all sand is shifting. But the truism that businesses are like sharks, and they keep moving or die, should earn them no compassion. The sound of money is shrill; the sound of music keeps us alive.

We live in an age of heightened linguistic ambiguity, with words and meanings constantly hammered into new shapes. Indie long ago became a decorative affectation, but its unabridged form is made of stronger stuff. Independence in art and its ancillary businesses is not an aesthetic, or even a principle – it's a reality of self-determination that either exists or does not.

The music landscape is certainly ripe for a new Bandcamp, or new Spotify, built from similar frameworks but run with different ideologies and a commitment to those whose passions power the enterprise. However, all tech institutions are beholden to the means and moods of their programmers and directors. Renter's rights are the first to be dismissed.

The music world, like many domains, is quick to condemn pre-existing systems as antiquated: producers, labels, distributors, record shops. But lately there is a sense of older wisdoms beginning to come full circle. The act of disruption may initially feel liberating, but unforeseen variables and vagaries come into play as momentum gathers. When the dust settles, the results rarely resemble what its instigator imagined. Tearing down a gate is easy enough; deciding what to build in its place is the harder part. ●

Neil Kulkarni on Avant Rock

1 **Big Blood**
First Aid Kit (Ba Da Bing)
2 **Modern Nature**
No Fixed Point In Space (Bella Union)
3 **Divide And Dissolve**
Systemic (Invada)
4 **Megalithic Levitation**
Obscure Fire (Addicted)
5 **Cultura Tres**
Camino De Brujos (AJM Sound)
6 **Teri Gender Bender**
Catspeak EP (Clouds Hill)
7 **The Gorge**
Mechanical Fiction (Pelagic)
8 **Sult**
Always I Gnaw (Thin Wrist)
9 **Klara Lewis + Nik Colk Void**
Full On (Editions Mego)
10 **Jim Wallis**
In Huge Gesturing Loops (Tip Top)

Strangely, the best avant rock this year... rocked. Of course, it also *refused* to rock at times, overlapping with the further reaches of other music, jazz, electronica and dub. But if avant rock could be demarcated in 2023 it was when a generally innovative, exploratory attitude towards music found itself in the hands of people who absolutely couldn't let go of guitars, of bass, of drums, of the *pleasures* of rock, even if they were deeply suspicious of rock's mainstream motives, and their personas ran entirely contrary to the traditional four-frowny-blokes set-up.

Partly this return to pleasure for avant rock was down to manoeuvres in other genres – it was noticeable in 2023 that you heard true noise, abrasive, challenging, deranging noise, coming far more from electronic composers and artists – and the way electronic music has carved out that noise space, and part-colonised the creation of the kind of unholy racket you heard on records like Nonclassical's *Disruptive Frequencies* this year, meant that avant rock seemed less keen on the increasingly orthodox abrasiveness possible with guitars and reached for fictionalised pasts as a way of investing rock with possibility again.

One thing I would say has entirely absconded from rock is an idea of a future – avant rock rather apprehends its trajectory now not in idealistic notions of progress, rather a bringing together of impulses, people and ideas traditionally rejected by rock, and a fierce exploration of summating the present moment by reconfiguring previous highs. It's as if rock has finally admitted that technology has erased linear time, and has bought all possible pasts (and all possible futures) into the present moment.

Increasingly, the sheer difficulty of surviving as a musician and the after effects of Covid led to a sense of playfulness and delight in rock, an apprehension of avant rock's inconsequentiality that actually massively liberated a new sense of fun and joy in a lot of music this year, a resigned anti-careerism that yielded a truly untethered exploration of pure pleasure. Two years of lockdown meant that bands returned with twisted visions forged in a strange place between lassitude and frenzy – two years of falling down rabbit holes followed by brief creative periods of unleashing all that pent up source material.

Big Blood's queer mix of a family dynamic with epic 1980s balladry and desert rock wonder was a perfect example – this was music in which you felt you could identify the sources, but because the amalgam was so unique it genuinely seemed to posit a startling new way for rock to sound. At the opposite end of the volume scale, Modern Nature found a point somewhere between math rock stealth, Talk Talk-style space and Spain-style jazziness to create a hybridisation of 'quiet' music that felt entirely new. Of course, as ever, cocking an ear outside of rock's normal orbits yielded wonders in 2023: Cultura Tres lashed down a South American firestorm of apocalyptic hardcore as informed by South American politics as it was by forerunners like Sepultura and Sarcófago; Megalithic Levitation piped us the most disturbingly psychedelic miasmic doom from the industrial wastelands of the Urals; and Divide And Dissolve shot their astonishing doom rock through with the Indigenous grievances of the Maori and Tslagi peoples.

The next stage for music is always when the traditionally marginalised find their voice, which tends to occur where commerce is disregarded entirely. In avant rock, 2024 must be the year we seek out even more from outside our traditional Northern/Western hemispheres and tap into avant rock as it exists now, a global form that refuses the expected, the marketable, the mainstream. More important than ever.

Joe Muggs on Critical Beats

1 **Cleo Sol**
"Know That You Are Loved (DJ Maestro & DJ Supa D Remix)" (No label)
2 **Kamo Mphela/Khalil Harrison/Tyler ICU featuring Baby SON**
"Dalie" (Kamo Mphela Entertainment)
3 **Samrai**
"Work & Roti" (Sangha Industries)
4 **Nia Archives**
"Off Wiv Ya Heads"
(Nia Archives/Universal Music)
5 **JAGS 639 x PVSSY**
"Azotandote" (CTM)
6 **Lighght**
"SKRONK!!!" (Lighght)
7 **Camellia**
"Screw // Owo // Screw (Lowong Version)" (Pony Canyon Inc)
8 **Toya Delazy/Tash LC/Ahadadream**
"QOBA" (More Time)
9 **Sicaria**
Blood, Sweat & Self (Club Confi:DANCE)
10 **ERAM**
"LOUC@ DE @" (ERAM)

Global flux, decentring and recontextualisation are the prime movers in dance culture. The supreme example remains amapiano: three years after it exploded worldwide during Covid lockdown, it is South Africa's dominant musical form and influential from Vietnam to Morocco. Take a South African hit record like "Dalie" – built on decades of dialogue with Chicago, London and other house centres, it's bass, primal and monumental; it completely deconstructs pop/underground duality. The style has fully ensconced itself in the UK's musical language too, from underground electronics and grime fusions as featured on Scratcha DVA's DRMTRK label to remixes of soul/R&B artists by the likes of Hagan and Karen KG Nyame; on the latter front, sometime UK funky don Supa D's remix of Cleo Sol has become the modern equivalent of a dubplate anthem, ubiquitous in raves and on radio but still unreleased months on.

Elsewhere in the intercontinental criss-crossing, hardcore took on new meanings as it interfaced with different life experiences. Populist older sounds like donk and hard house are being revived – occasionally with tiresome irony, but just as often with a clear sense of function, as with DJ ERAM who slams together donk, proto-jungle and baile funk with fierce feminist, anti-establishment energy derived from illegal raves she attended in Brazil as a child. A completely different type of South American hardcore happens when techno and club tropes mix with local forms, as in the Ecuadorian industrial dembow of JAGS 639 x PVSSY's "Azotandote".

Nia Archives, though not born when hardcore and jungle hit, has generally treated it as a folk form, working with veterans, her beats tearing and her vocals naturally mixing Yorkshire and Caribbean. But on "Off Wiv Ya Heads" she doesn't sing or chat but flips the mainstream 2000s indie dance of A-Track's remix of Yeah Yeah Yeahs' "Heads Will Roll" into a thrill ride that's entirely authentic in its confluence. Ireland's Lighght has worked with so many artists worldwide that he can bang out razor-edged dancehall and Latin-edged club tracks and remain true to his experience too. And Japanese musician Camellia, who my 13 year old son (!) introduced me to, makes Squarepusher sound like Mr Fingers, happy hardcore, US dubstep, jungle, jazz fusion, metal and anime kawaii camp slamming together, but in a way that is rooted in the physicality of an international rhythm game culture.

On it goes, connections reinforcing like synapses in the global cultural nervous system. Former Swing Ting impresario Samrai joins Northampton, Manchester, Jamaica and Punjab into emotionally and politically charged grooves like it's the most natural thing in the world. Sicaria injects Gnawa rhythms into the hinterland between deep dubstep and grime not through pursuit of exoticism but because it's in her family background. Tash LC (of Boko! Boko!) and Ahadadream weave their Caribbean and South Asian heritage into South African gqom, over which Toya Delazy intones a Zulu anthem to queerness ("Qoba" translates as "Slay!"). It is, in every way possible, a lot – and in that plentitude is power and joy.

Steve Barker on Dub & Reggae

1 **Paul St Hilaire**
Tikiman Vol 1 (Kynant)
2 **Augustus Pablo**
Roots, Rockers & Dub (Nature Sounds)
3 **Panda Bear/Sonic Boom/Adrian Sherwood**
Reset In Dub (Domino)
4 **Michael Smith**
Mi Cyaan Believe It (Island)
5 **Element**
Particular Angle – Blurring Off Into Its Opposite (NewDubHall)
6 **Herman Chin Loy**
Musicism Dub (Pressure Sounds)
7 **Joe Gibbs & The Professionals**
100 Years Of Dub (Doctor Bird)
8 **Noda & Wolfers**
Tascam Space Station (LIES/Nightwind)
9 **Horace Ferguson**
Sensi Addict (333)
10 **Creation Rebel**
Hostile Environment (On-U Sound)

Another year when the revive market passed all expectations, as it has continued to perform year by year – and it's not just the reissues coming round again for the nth time. In the Island Records (now part of megacorp UMG) Black Stories series we were lucky to find the first reissue since its debut in 1982 of Michael Smith's *Mi Cyaan Believe It*, co-produced by Linton Kwesi Johnson and Dennis Bovell. The album was a stark observation of the state of play in Jamaica and beyond, and he was murdered the following year. Also in that series is an expanded version of LKJ's own compelling *Forces Of Victory*, probably his best and most impactful work.

Although globally reggae remains healthy, no major new strands of the genre have mutated, though dub still infects much of the output in the leftfield. Gavsborg of Equiknoxx can be relied on to come up with startling variations on the dub theme. Now resident in Berlin, his influence is growing, and the nonstop flow of crushingly heavy emanations from Kevin 'The Bug' Martin's Pressure label may soon make it almost impossible for him to locate a rig to carry his sound live.

Undefined out of Japan created the genre's finest recent album in 2022 with *Defined Riddim* on Portland's Khaliphonic label. In 2023 Element stepped forward as the new sonic challenger with an intoxicating mix of abstract roots and dancehall riddim on his NewDubHall 10", and catching us before the end of the year with his *Nine Mall* EP on Parallel Line, while previously Noda Takafumi aka Mystica Tribe linked up long range with hyperactive Dutch electronica producer Danny Wolfers aka Legowelt, to come up with *Tascam Space Season*, a lesson on how to have fun dubbing.

The re-emergence of Paul St Hilaire after a series of inconsequential collaborations was both welcome and remarkable. As the unchallenged king of dub techno vocals, his return with the self-produced *Tikiman Vol 1* was a refreshing surprise with its expansive lyrical content, his off-kilter use of guitar breaks, and the deep but varied sonic depths all making the set outstanding. The prospect of a dub mix to Panda Bear and Pete Kember's 2022 album *Reset*, given its outrageously shameful but skillful plundering of 1960s pop riffs and licks, seemed unlikely, but Adrian Sherwood gave it the time and space it deserved and came up with his finest non On-U Sound dub project since the *Echo Dek* reworking of Primal Scream's *Vanishing Point*. He may have dumped Eddie Cochran's guitar from "Gettin' To The Point". but in his reverse dubbing style he adds a lot more. Back on On-U Sound, African Head Charge delivered their most commercially accessible album to date with *A Trip To Bolgatanga*, but it was label mates Creation Rebel who took the headlines with their first album in four decades with *Hostile Environment*, a confident return with a set of modern instant reggae classics.

Over the last few years, French label Only Roots has performed a fine service by repressing some of the best rarities and lost classics from the catalogue of the legendary Augustus Pablo, but his son Addis collated a really excellent primer of his late father's work for Nature Sounds on *Roots, Rockers & Dub*. Best set of surprise releases for 2023 came from Luke Owen of the label Death Is Not The End and his spinoff imprint 333 who excavated a series of really splendidly obscure singles, some Prince Jazzbo classics and Horace Ferguson's peerless album *Sensi Addict*. Clearly there's no dominant fresh directions happening with reggae and dub but the sheer expanse of the styles and creativity demonstrated across both revives and new work is enough to hold old fans and pull in newcomers alike.

Spenser Tomson on Electronics

1 **Philip Jeck & Chris Watson**
Oxmardyke (Touch)
2 **Richie Culver**
Alone In The Living Room (Drowned By Locals)
3 **Teresa Winter**
Proserpine (Night School)
4 **Kate Carr**
False Dawn (Flaming Pines)
5 **Meemo Comma**
Loverboy (Planet Mu)
6 **Conflux Coldwell**
Memorex Mori (Subexotic Records)
7 **Lucie Páchová**
Крънджилица (Skupina)
8 **Katie Gately**
Fawn/Brute (Houndstooth)
9 **patten**
Mirage FM (555-5555)
10 **Penelope Trappes**
Heavenly Spheres (Nite Hive)

When writing these end of year reflections, my focus has previously centred around the more fantastical potential of electronic music, those artists and musicians who use the medium to explore uncanny zones or create new worlds. In 2023, driven by various factors – the ongoing situations in Gaza and Ukraine, the ongoing shitshow that is the British Conservative Party, the ongoing global ecological crisis – I have been drawn less to electronic music's sense of abstract escapism and more to those pieces which seem to be thinking about tangible escape routes, about resisting, navigating and, most of all, *changing* the current state of affairs.

In a technological sense, patten's *Mirage FM* sits at the vanguard of change; constructed entirely from samples culled from AI text to audio prompts – the first project of this kind to do so – Neil Kulkarni's review (*The Wire* 470) identifies the questions which are bound to arise from the increasing use of artificial intelligence in the creation of art. However, his review also acknowledges that the approach has resulted in something sonically unique, "with a crate digger's attention to detail, but using entirely different sources, lacing together tiny shards of degraded digital detritus spanning the history of recorded sound". Yes, patten's album thrilled me, but the scope of the material and the potential for change offered by the technology it utilised thrilled me ten times more.

What I was really looking for in 2023, though, was a sense of political and social change, of something stirring in the overlooked fringes – as a fellow Northerner,

the work of Richie Culver provided it. Following 2022's *I Was Born By The Sea*, a wind-beaten mixture of fading rave textures and caustic coastal vocal, *Alive In The Living Room* goes darker and heavier. Accompanied by a hymn book, written in Arabic, with close-up photographs of fingernails which could be hard-worn, bitten to the quick, or tortured, it's a startlingly affecting exploration of identity and self-doubt. It also consolidates Culver's position beside the likes of Teresa Winter in Leeds and Manchester's Hyperdawn, disparate pockets of artists whose work shares a sense of progress and change, beamed with wit and optimism straight from the forgotten North.

This isn't intended to read like a warped polemic or a channelling of my own underlying dissatisfactions through this year's listening list. Well, maybe a bit; what I'm trying to convey is the sense of pure hope that I was able to take not just from Culver and Winter, but from the rumbling soundscapes of Kate Carr or haunted field recordings of Lucie Páchová. These musicians gave me assurance that the weird fringes still have a voice, windswept and hoarse, embittered and dry, but a voice all the same, growing in anger as it struggles to be heard above the current doomy, grey rumble.

Francis Gooding on Global

1 **Joaquín Orellana**
Sacratávica (Identidata)
2 **Umeko Ando**
Upopo Sanke (Pingipung)
3 **Malombo Jazz Makers**
Down Lucky's Way (Tapestry Works)
3 **Jaffar Hussein Randhawa**
Guldasta (Hohiunhoni)
4 **Madhuvanti Pal**
The Holy Mother (Sublime Frequencies)
5 ***The NID Tapes: Electronic Music From India 1969–1972***
Various (The state51 Conspiracy)
6 ***Soul Of Congo: Treasures Of The Ngoma Label***
Various (Planet Ilunga)
7 **Vumbi Dekula**
Congo Guitar (Hive Mind/Sing-A-Song Fighter)
8 **Ara Tokatlian & Enrique Villegas**
Inspiración (Altercat)
9 **Keanu Nelson**
Wilurarrakutu (Altered States)
10 **Berke Can Özcan**
Twin Rocks (Omni Sound)

Autumn came in with a death: my friend Julian Sebothane Bahula, the original Malombo drummer, passed away in South Africa at the age of 84. I'd seen him the week before, at his home in Fulham in London. His body was failing and there was nothing to be done; he was very weak and he knew it was time to go. We spoke for a while and said our goodbyes; he left for Johannesburg the next day. I had first got to know him just over a decade ago. He and his late wife Liza had welcomed me at their retirement bungalow in Westbury, where I interviewed him about his music, his years in exile, and his anti-apartheid activism.

We remained friends, and eventually worked together on some releases. He was keen to help me document his experience of exile and the role of the musicians in the struggle – something he felt remained seriously under-appreciated – and I felt the music he had made with Malombo Jazz Makers before he left South Africa should be heard more widely. Julian was one of the most important South African musicians of his generation: he had introduced indigenous drums to South African jazz; he had won South Africa's most prestigious jazz festival award with The Malombo Jazzmen in 1964 (The Blue Notes had won the year before); he had worked underground with the ANC and Steve Biko at great risk to himself and his family.

Malombo music was the soundtrack to the South Africa's Black Consciousness movement, and his drums inspired a whole wave of bands including Batsumi, Dashiki and Malopoets. In exile, he worked tirelessly for the ANC, and he organised the first concert for Mandela at London's Alexandra Palace in 1983 – it is no exaggeration to say that the transformation of Mandela from a hero of anti-colonial struggle to a household name whose fate was a byword for the injustice of apartheid was largely effected by means of music. That was in no small part due directly to Julian's work. It is good to make friends with experienced people who are a lot older than oneself; it is good to have elders. I'll miss him, and I'm glad I helped people get to hear his music.

Sometimes I think the whole global music caravan is really a kind of search for elders; even if it is not about personal connections, a lot of it is certainly about seeking out and acknowledging older musics. It's not that they have to be played by older people, though one of the welcome hallmarks of the world music industry has been its enthusiasm for acknowledged masters in diverse traditions. It's more that the music makers and consumers of the Global North have, since the folk and blues revival of the postwar era, sought to absorb the folk traditions of the South and the marginalised as a series of surrogate musical parents, having had most of their own cultural patrimony destroyed along with everything else in the fires of industrial capitalism.

Earnest and reverential tones still define the encounter with any music linked to a well-maintained cultural tradition, and sometimes it's cringeworthy and patronising (racism ruins everything) but in other ways it is quite proper. The traditions underpinning *The Holy Mother* or *Guldasta* are not hundreds but thousands of years old; Orellana's monumental *Sacratávica* speaks for the thousands of murdered indigenous Guatemalans who were still at the sharp end of the conquest of the Americas into the 1970s; Umeko Ando was the living voice of an Ainu world long pushed to the edges in northern Japan. Julian's malopo drums were traditionally used in Pedi healing ceremonies, and the music of the Malombos was always healing music for a sickened land and a wounded people. The violence isn't over, and there will be a lot of healing to be done when one day it is. It will be good to have elders. Hamba kahle, Julian.

Mosi Reeves on Hiphop & R&B

1 **billy woods & Kenny Segal**
Maps (Backwoodz Studioz)
2 **Liv.e**
Girl In The Half-Pearl (Real Life Music)
3 **Noname**
Sundial (Noname Inc/AWAL)
3 **SZA**
SOS (Top Dawg Entertainment/RCA)
4 **Danny Brown**
Quaranta (Warp)
5 **Ice Spice**
Like..? (10K Projects/Capitol)
5 **Cleo Sol**
Gold (Forever Living Originals)
6 **MIKE**
Burning Desire (10k)
7 **El Michels Affair & Black Thought**
Glorious Game (Big Crown)
8 **Maxo**
Even God Has A Sense Of Humor (Def Jam)

As I write this, Cassie – whose 2006 self-titled debut wielded influence on the feted alt-R&B scene of the 2010s – has just accused former paramour Sean 'Puff Daddy' Combs of years long sexual assault and other crimes in an explosive civil lawsuit (a settlement was agreed the very next day). The dramatic episode feels like an appropriate finale to a year that began with cheery proclamations of hiphop's purported 50th anniversary (of a DJ Kool Herc party in The Bronx) before degrading into complaints from too many OGs that today's youth have ruined the artform. As writer Kia Fitzgerald put on social media, "N***as spent all year talking about... hiphop being dead meanwhile it was their generation... abusing the women in and around the hiphop community and not saying shit." Or, as Slick Rick succinctly put it on his timeless "Hey Young World", *"If you smoke crack, your kids will smoke crack tomorrow"*.

So, what have the children learned from hiphop's golden generation of the 1980s and 90s? The genre teems with too much life. Every month brings hot young spitters – one week

Weapons of Mass Distraction

The war between Israel and Gaza and its civilian death toll calls into question the role of artists in challenging those in power

By GAIKA

A Palestinian father cradles a small child covered in dark grey brick dust in Gaza, her tiny bomb-mutilated body rendered limp. She has a gaping hole in her cheek. It is clear she is dead. I scroll away guiltily, steady myself and scroll back. He holds her in the crook of his arm as he crouches on the rubble surrounding him. His other arm is outstretched with a camera phone in hand, taking one last selfie with his daughter, and he sings to her softly as he does this, a final heart rending lullaby, oblivious to the danger of aerial assault. People are wailing all around him. They are pulling dismembered ashen limbs from the remains of obliterated homes. Others are capturing the scene as a record of this massacre, filming in the vain hope that someone is watching who believes them to be more than an image to flick past. They scream maddening screams in disbelief at this global abandonment, still unable to process that the bonds of humanity fail with distance, selfishness, greed and racism.

A moment later on my timeline, another man stands on a stage in Hackney, East London, entirely indifferent to the murder above him. His back is turned to the audience, he too has his arm stretched out to record a video, as a room full of Stone Island-clad lads sing his lyrics back to him in football-terrace-like hero worship. People are jumping up and down on stage in giddy celebration. Delirious drunken chanting fills the air as he grins into the camera, pleased at the moment of connection. How can they do that at a time like this, I think, unfairly.

Scrolling between the videos places me somewhere between nausea and rage. Somehow this unrelated concert feels like an orgy of disrespect in its timing and its spirit. I know this artist but I don't know how he feels right now. He is not obliged to share politics nor express any opinions. An algorithm has placed his moment of local glory next to moments of foreign destruction in a grotesque cauldron of technology and processed emotion.

The Palestinian father is sobbing uncontrollably, the singer is signing naked white limbs, the Palestinian mothers are searching for them, the artist sprays champagne in the air in celebration, the dust-grey people are sprayed with the blood of their children, the fans look like flag-waving soldiers. Or just some ordinary people trying to have a good time.

Social media has distorted fandom into a jumble of matrices and that often end up with us pointing fingers at each other in judgement. Who signed which letter? Who didn't? Who didn't speak up? Who did? It's all here as metadata on the digital record forever, obscuring the art itself.

Searching for the role of the artist in a hyper-connected world becomes a sordid assessment of artificially presented or perceived values. We live in the era of billionaire music moguls and the ubiquitous creative industry worker. Artistry is perhaps diverted away from chaotic empathy or collective aesthetics and towards purposeful individualism for profit. The grind of nonstop content generation renders the separation of art and libertarian lifestyle near impossible. Simultaneously, the complete separation of an artist's social privilege and collective responsibility is positively encouraged.

These conflicting urges are no longer connected to commonplace constructions of popularly consumed protest music. During times of geopolitical turmoil, streaming ecosystems have become cultural rolling pins that beg the politically conscious artist to examine their work in axiomatic terms.

The creation, performance and collective experience of music is a grouping of transitional rituals that can become sources of revolutionary political action. For these ritual complexes to be successful, tolerance, chaos, collaboration, violence, sexuality, focus, discipline, honesty, communication, etc all need to be harnessed within all parts of the action.

However, as the rituals of music are formed over millennia, they cannot be explained in terms of particular conjectures or strategies of individual actors. These rituals are viscerally driven, and their political utility relates to their 'being' rather than their perceived meaning at the time of their execution.

Even as patterns of consumer behaviour, musical rituals pertain to a realm of experience different from everyday economic activity. They cannot be construed as simply a direct expression of class issues. The models of political action that result from musical rituals are often in direct competition with one another.

The role of an artist during such times of turbulence thus becomes a basic matter of human conscience. In the construction of my own moral algorithm I wilfully choose to see the bridge between the two sequences lurking side by side on my electronic device. Both are radical projections of reality enabled by technology. Both are honest cries for emotional validation and the support of others.

Crucially, one sequence is not possible without the other. The massacre of around 14,000 Palestinians at the hands of the Israeli army is not possible without the indifference (at best) of Western populations. Our governments have actively supported the racist oppression of colonised people for centuries. Such oppression is not possible without the complicity and comfort of the intellectual classes to which 'artists' surely now belong. The normalisation of the destruction of those who we choose to other begins with the self-silencing of those most naturally able to convince their friends, family, peers, fans and followers that such oppression is wrong.

That dehumanisation of others goes hand in hand with its opposite – the aggrandisement and adulation of apolitical celebrity. Fame can be merely a weapon of mass distraction, or it can be a tool used to hold power to account. I firmly believe that it is the artist's responsibility to use the notoriety that artistry may create to be a reality check on those who govern unjustly, not simply to revel in the petty machinations of social competition.

The goal of 'making it' shifts with every rags to riches artist cast into legend. Moreover the pursuit of basic security in a grossly uneven society can lead many artists to place their financial well-being over the moral integrity of their work. To me that's simply no excuse, look at where we are, standing at the foot of an epoch of fascist brutality.

I could never just sing along. ●

it's Veeze, the next brings BabyDrill – whose flows and ability to imbue stock themes of money and swagger with lyrical excitement are dissected like sabermetricians analysing a ballplayer's stats.

Plenty of women have joined the party, too, from Ice Spice to Sexyy Red, as some fret nervously at how they rip through bars while jiggling around in gaudy, fleshy outfits. Everyone acknowledges that sex appeal remains an intractable part of the mainstream package, yet are hesitant to discuss the negative aspects of the bargain. No one wants to ask why women who don't flaunt their bodies can't get traction, as when Chicago activist Noname couldn't land on *Billboard*'s charts despite having the best-reviewed rap album of the year in *Sundial*.

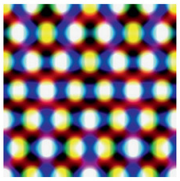
The underground feels like a necessary tonic to a mainstream overly reliant on exhausted corporate titans like Drake and Travis Scott. But it has stalwarts too. The Backwoodz Studioz empire is led by billy woods, a man who began his career in the early aughts. Danny Brown, whose haunting *Quaranta* documents a history of substance abuse and heartache, is in his forties. Many of the most talked about projects were helmed by The Alchemist, a producer who apprenticed with Cypress Hill's DJ Muggs in the early 1990s. Yet these indie stars still flourished with creative vigour. Albums like MIKE's *Burning Desire*, Armand Hammer's *We Buy Diabetic Test Strips*, and Earl Sweatshirt and The Alchemist's *Voir Dire* pleased despite being riven by familiar tics.

Some would claim that with the underground in a reasonably healthy state, and the mainstream fed by brash aspirants that geeks can obsess over, there's nothing to worry about. Yet the diehards who got mad when some in the music industry, prompted by news that no rap albums topped the charts until Lil Uzi Vert's *Pink Tape* in early July, claimed the genre was in decline missed the larger point. Movements are as much about perception as participation. Jazz music has always bustled with innovation but when tastemakers deemed it dead in the 70s, business opportunities evaporated and public appreciation for new acts dwindled.

Yet jazz, which now bursts with young iconoclasts inspired by hiphop like Kassa Overall and Slauson Malone, offers a second lesson for heads worried over their beloved culture's future. They can lose themselves in the music's boundless varieties, break away from the destructive habits that yields so many corrupt Puff Daddies, and put their trust in the arc of history.

Stewart Smith on Jazz & Improv

1 **Darius Jones**
fLuXkit Vancouver (~~its~~ suite but sacred) (We Jazz)
2 **Ingrid Laubrock**
Monochromes (Intakt)
3 **Matana Roberts**
Coin Coin Chapter 5: In The Garden (Constellation)
4 **Steve Lehman & Orchestre National De Jazz**
Ex Machina (Pi Recordings)
5 **jaimie branch**
Fly Or Die Fly Or Die Fly Or Die (World War) (International Anthem)
6 **James Brandon Lewis**
For Mahalia, With Love (Tao Forms)
7 **Henry Threadgill**
The Other One (Pi Recordings)
8 **Mendoza Hoff Revels**
Echolocation (Aum Fidelity)
9 **Joe McPhee/Mette Rasmussen/ Dennis Tyfus**
Oblique Strategies (Black Truffle)
10 **Keith & Julie Tippett**
Couple In Spirit: Sound On Stone (Discus)



In a year where Henry Threadgill and George Lewis published important books and Anthony Braxton was featured composer at Darmstadt summer school, it's fitting that many of the finest 'jazz' releases occupy the space they helped open up, where genre is fluid and ingenious compositional systems meet state of the art improvisation.

Emerging from a series of residencies at Western Front in Vancouver, Darius Jones's *fLuXkit Vancouver (~~its~~ suite but sacred)* is a riveting work of creative music, with the alto saxophonist plus drummer Gerald Cleaver joined by the Canadian string quartet of violinists Jesse and Jonathan Zubot, cellist Peggy Lee and bassist James Meger. Using Western and graphic notation, Jones has the string players moving seamlessly between chamber group forms and gnarly improvisation. Putting a mythic spin on the history of the Vancouver arts space, the suite is a moving celebration of community and friendship.

Jones also appeared on Matana Roberts's *Coin Coin Chapter 5*, his wrenching alto adding to the voices bearing witness to the composer's account of a female relative who died following complications from an illegal abortion. With reproductive rights under threat, Roberts's intervention is all the more urgent, while their music is as potent and inventive as ever, with a crack ensemble weaving together elements of free jazz, avant garde composition, folk and spoken word.

Ingrid Laubrock began the year with one of her finest albums to date, *The Last Quiet Place*, then topped it with *Monochromes*, where a quartet improvise in real time over a series of tape compositions. The amount of work that went into creating these "monochromes", including a 29 part trumpet choir and an exploration of Harry Bertoia's sonambient sculptures, is remarkable, and they inspire stunning improvisations from Laubrock and her comrades. *The Last Quiet Place* appeared on Kris Davis's label Pyroclastic, a vital platform for stylistically mobile releases from Angelica Sanchez, Brandon Seabrook, Mark Dresser, Sylvie Courvoisier, Corey Smythe and Davis herself.

Steve Lehman's collaboration with Frédéric Maurin and The Orchestre National De Jazz marks new territory for orchestral composition, with thrilling solos and lively polyrhythms bringing heat to an alien soundworld of spectral harmonies and interactive electronics. It appeared on Pi Recordings alongside Kate Gentile's mind-boggling *Find Letter X*, Tyshawn Sorey's exquisite *Continuing*, and Henry Threadgill's *The Other One*. Taking inspiration from Milford Graves's integration of the human heartbeat into music, the latter is another essential work from the master.

The end of the year is a time to reflect on those we've lost: Peter Brötzmann, Carla Bley, Wayne Shorter, Charles Gayle and Tristan Honsinger among them. Recorded weeks before her tragic death in August 2022, jaimie branch's final Fly Or Die album is testament to her incredible spirit. The trumpeter leads her band through a gorgeous set of liberation jams, drawing on punk, Latin, dub and country, combining killer grooves with timbral exploration. Keith and Julie Tippett's *Sound On Stone* album sees the great singer adding songs and improvisations to recordings of her late husband's torrential solo piano: a creative act of love. Tenor saxophonist James Brandon Lewis released excellent albums with his Red Lily and Molecular groups, and also appeared on *Echolocation*, the stratospheric electric jazz debut from Mendoza Hoff Revels. Mining that sweet spot between free jazz and underground tape mulch, Joe McPhee, Mette Rasmussen and Dennis Tyfus embody the virtues of keeping it weird and real.

2023 has been a vintage year for unaccompanied solo recordings. From Brandon Lopez to Madison Greenstone, Sakina Abdou to Patrick Shiroishi, it's a thrill to see young musicians developing a language and explore what they and their instruments are capable of. Hear the future unfolding.

Julian Cowley on Modern Composition

1 **Natasha Barrett**
Reconfiguring The Landscape (Persistence Of Sound)
2 **Christopher Butterfield**
Souvenir (Redshift)
3 **Magnus Granberg**
Evening Star, Vesper Bell (Another Timbre)
4 **Roomful Of Teeth**
Rough Magic (New Amsterdam)
5 **Linda Catlin Smith**
Dark Flower (Redshift)
6 **Eden Lonsdale**
Clear And Hazy Moons (Another Timbre)
7 **Chris Brown**
Occhio (Artifact)

8 **John Luther Adams**
Darkness And Scattered Light (Cold Blue)
9 **Frank Denyer**
Melodies (Another Timbre)
10 **Michael Byron**
Halcyon Days (Cold Blue)

Natasha Barrett's *Reconfiguring The Landscape* is a meticulous distillation from her recent research project, exploring how 3D electroacoustic composition and sound art may convey with reasonable fidelity the sonic character of outdoor environments, while also making available to listeners unfamiliar levels of auditory awareness. Back in 2007, Barrett explained to me that electroacoustic music's involvement with spatial issues, then largely neglected in other forms of contemporary composition, was a decisive factor that drew her into that particular field of musical possibility. During the 1990s she undertook study with Jonty Harrison in Birmingham and Denis Smalley in London, before relocating to Oslo, where her own creative investigations have continued. Although deeply resistant to trends and fashion, Barrett has become a composer whose music inherently addresses issues, options and concerns that are notably resonant for attentive listeners in the 2020s. While she appreciates the widespread electroacoustic practice of sound diffusion through multiple channels as an effective approach to performance, Barrett's ongoing search for other means to compose spatial information and to project it, faithfully, to an audience has yielded stimulating results that transfer persuasively to stereo formats, as 2022's *Heterotopia* and this latest release vividly show. *Reconfiguring The Landscape* not only communicates an invigorating sense of participatory engagement that accompanies active listening, but also incorporates a range of compositional subtleties and meaningful complexities that spring from Barrett's serious reflection upon such listening.

Few of the musicians and sound artists who have chosen more recently to embrace space and incorporate environmental data within their work, whether to address ecological issues or simply to celebrate technological advances in field recording, can match Barrett's sophistication. Yet the refined character of her compositional voice doesn't diminish the enlivening qualities and appealing immediacy of *Reconfiguring The Landscape*. She has used Ambisonic microphones to capture spatial information, for subsequent decryption and transmission through her music, for more than 20 years now, and while mixing material for this release, Barrett sought to preserve that immersive sense of 'being there', which visitors have experienced at her site-specific installations.

The perceived rapidity of technological change in recent years, with AI's promise of heightened accelerations to come, is undoubtedly altering our sense of temporal and spatial relationships, within and beyond music and other arts, extending even into the most intimate forms of human relationship, and challenging established modes of social organisation. Digitalisation now involves, almost universally, our personal faculties of perception. Everyday technologies tint and edit what we see and hear, as technologies may always have done but now, it seems, with diminished opportunities for independence from their pervasive influence. Although Barrett makes a point of keeping up to date with current developments, she has remained alert to insidious ways in which mediating technologies may "colour our listening", and in the process compromise the integrity of her work. At a time when both personal and social memory seem to be affected fundamentally by the quickening pace of material life and a potentially overwhelming input of media images and information, Barrett's insightful attention to the spatial and durational character of real-world sound and to the compositional qualities of moments of memory make her both an indicative figure from the current musical landscape and an exceptional presence within it.

Raymond Cummings on Noise, Industrial & Beyond

1 **Merzbow**
Hatomatsuri (Dinzu Artefacts)
2 **Blood Of Chhinnamastika**
Hymn To Bagalamukhi (Abhorrent AD)
3 **Janna Lee**
The One That Got Away (Black Ring Rituals)
4 **Commuter**
No Longer Penitent (New Forces)
5 **Andrew Coltrane**
Self-Amputation (Oxidation)
6 **BEAM SPLITTER**
Split Jaw (Tripticks Tapes)
7 **Loren Chasse & Juho Toivonen**
Aclod (Hive Mind)
8 **Sobbing.**
Sobbing. (No label)
9 **Wolf Eyes & Model Home**
More Difficult Messages (Disciples)
10 **Asha Sheshadri & Mattin**
Slices Of Life (Mille Plateaux)

Any annual survey of a musical genre (or three) is like a skim of an ocean or a coring cut in a jungle – a valiant attempt to take stock of more material than any person or group of people could ever hope to process or evaluate. Yet: themes do reveal themselves and connections are made. The aptly titled *Slices Of Life* found Asha Sheshadri and Mattin shuffling together the incidental and confessional in fascinating, jarring ways, a synthesis echoed on the celebratory *Presque Tout #100* and the brave *Absolute Beginners* compilations, and rendered more singly on mHz's quarantine bummer *Same Room, Another Day*.

Sometimes magic erupts at more interactive intersections. *Retaliation Aesthetics*, the debut from international duo Rump State, collided uniquely fried approaches and emerged with something freshly strange and unexpectedly angelic. Arty noise rap outfit Model Home and scum noise vets Wolf Eyes collaborated on *More Difficult Messages*, arguably the best music either band made this year (which is really saying something), even though it sounded less like Model Home or Wolf Eyes and more like some extended space aliens on LSD panic attack glimpsed through 3D glasses.

The second BEAM SPLITTER album *Split Jaw* is where this unlikely pair's muse truly took flight, as glottal fugue state and bent trombone are fruitfully electrified. I don't know what Loren Chasse and Juho Toivonen each brought to the decks on *Aclod*, but they either managed to make rushing water sound otherworldly, or to use effects to simulate tuning water – the result is engrossing, not quite real, and hard to turn away from. *All The Duos*, where guitarist Sandy Ewen and turntablist Maria Chavez find common, abstracted musical cause, is another example of the alchemy that can emerge when two idiosyncratic musicians fuse their talents.

Some artists took on the cruel world beyond their headphones: on the blistering, confrontational *The One That Got Away*, Janna Lee reckoned, full-on, with errant exes, and Commuter's *No Longer Penitent* papier-mâchéd ugly field recordings into a probing study of urban decay. Others closed the blinds and placed their full faith and credit in abused tapes and corroded electronics: see Sharkiface's swampy *Climax Is A Process*, Andrew Coltrane's shuddering *Self-Amputation*, Joe Colley's fork in a socket wonder *Pleasure Pressure*, Parasite Nurse's wavelength freefall *Life Is Beautiful*, a string of scary, scabbed slabs from formidable newcomer Sobbing., and every unclassifiable sound sinkhole Dave Phillips issued this year.

While noise has evolved into a many-splendoured thing over the decades, there's always room for full-tilt immolations. Restless vet Merzbow's screaming *Hatomatsuri* and relative newbie Blood Of Chhinnmastika's whirring *Hymn To Bagalamukhi* stoked that psychic urge to self-combust, as did salvos from Michelle Lou, Incapacitants, Death Glaze, Chrysalis & Ecclesiastical Scaffolding, Demon Life, The Ide Of Earth, Mai 12, Werewolf Jerusalem, a resurgent Black Pus, and Yotzeret Sheydim, whose marathon-sized statements of purpose were sometimes longer than weekend double work shifts in the summertime.

And, again, this is just a taste of it all – explore beyond these signposts and risk becoming lost to yourself, your friends and your loved ones for all of eternity. If that's what you're into, of course. ●

Archive Releases of the Year

1–50

1 Milford Graves with Arthur Doyle & Hugh Glover
Children Of The Forest
(Black Editions Archive)

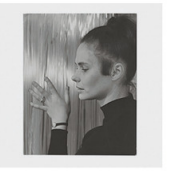
The second collection of recordings drawn from the free jazz drummer's own archives documented sessions from January–March 1976 in Graves's basement as the trio prepared for the concert album *Bäbi*. Bill Meyer said: "Instead of enacting a ritual for an audience, he was teaching his acolytes the ceremony... regardless of instrumentation, they sound like one hydra-headed, octopus armed beast." (June/472)

2 John Coltrane with Eric Dolphy
Evenings At The Village Gate
(Impulse!)

This recently rediscovered 1961 mono club recording of Coltrane's quintet with Dolphy offered a rare non-studio version of "Africa" alongside signature Coltrane numbers "Impressions" and "My Favourite Things". Brian Morton said: "The essays by Ashley Kahn, Lakecia Benjamin, Branford Marsalis and Reggie Workman add real insight... in an ever more nuanced picture of who and what Coltrane and Dolphy really were." (August/474)

3 Carl Stone
Electronic Music From 1972–2022
(Unseen Worlds)

The third Unseen Worlds compilation of Stone material encompassed 50 years of the composer's career, from inventive tape splicing to his embrace of sampling and computer music. Antonio Poscic said: "The material illustrates Stone's evolution, but also highlights what an ingenious composer and sound manipulator he was in his teens, one who would later hungrily tap into new technologies to fully realise his vision." (October/476)



4 Annea Lockwood
Glass World
(Room40)

Following on from 1967's The Glass Concert, the sound artist's 1970 debut LP explored a complex and fragile sonic world, from wobbling ultra-thin microscopy sheets to a wine glass, a water gong and a twinkling chandelier. Xenia Benivolski said: "As with many minimalist recordings, the arrangement of the sounds suggests hidden, perhaps unintended narratives." (October/476)

5 *The NID Tapes: Electronic Music From India 1969–1972*
Various
(The State51 Conspiracy)

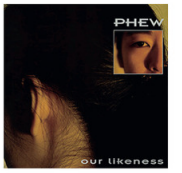
Music from the archives of the National Institute of Design in Ahmedabad, where a studio established by David Tudor with a Moog Modular and tape machine in 1969 formed a meeting point for Indian classical and Western minimalism. Neil Kulkarni said: "An absolute goldmine, *The NID Tapes* is a righteous rewriting and recovery of a great lost chapter in electronic music's history." (September/475)

6 Tony Conrad/Arnold Dreyblatt/ Jim O'Rourke
Tonic 19-01-2001
(Black Truffle)

Black Truffle's 100th release captured a one-off performance by the trio at New York's Downtown venue. Moving from pulsating intensity to more pastoral realms, it found Dreyblatt and O'Rourke perfectly attuned to Conrad's just intonation vision. Brian Morton said: "It's a genuinely epochal moment in the slow, but constantly backsliding acknowledgement of Conrad's role in American composition." (May/471)

7 Arthur Russell
Picture Of Bunny Rabbit
(Audika)

Nine previously unreleased recordings made by the musician and composer in the run-up to 1986's *World Of Echo*, *Picture Of Bunny Rabbit* shared that album's deceptively featherlight style, with songs crafted from cello, voice and reverb joined by guitar instrumentals. Louis Pattison said: "Russell has become a reference point, frequently mimicked, but there remains something singular and ineffable about his music." (July/473)



8 Phew
Our Likeness
(Mute)

The third solo album from the former vocalist of Japanese post-punks Aunt Sally found Phew continuing her fruitful collaboration with German avant rock luminaries including Jaki Liebezeit and Alexander Hacke, for a varied collection including sound collage, gothic ballads and hard rock. Claire Biddles said: "Cohesion isn't expected or necessarily desired from such a wide-ranging album, but there's something alchemical about the way all its disparate elements are connected." (April/470)

9 Techno Animal
Re-Entry
(Relapse)

The second album from Kevin Martin and Justin Broadrick drew out dark undercurrents from the oceanic drifts of mid-1990s ambient, mining veins of isolation and dread that were less Eno than oh-no. Louis Pattison said: "Clanking breakbeats and claustrophobic sound design put flesh on the conceptual bones of a series of cyberpunk track titles that evoke space travel, narcotics and particle physics." (October/476)

10 Abdul Wadud
By Myself
(Bisharra/Gotta Groove)

Originally issued in 1978 as the sole record on Wadud's own Bisharra label, *By Myself* was approved by Wadud for remastered rerelease before the cellist's death in 2022. Drawing upon a background in the jazz, classical and pop worlds (including touring with Stevie Wonder), it moved effortlessly from lyrical bowed passages to frenetic grainy strokes, and from buoyant chords to complex cascades of woody pizzicato.

11 AR Kane
AR Kive
(Rocket Girl)

Compiling AR Kane's 1988–89 releases, *AR Kive* situated Alex Ayuli and Rudy Tambala's harnessing of dreamy dub, feedback-soaked (pre)post-rock, heady electronic beats and jangly psychedelic pop as both exemplary of its time and seeding the future. John Morrison said: ""Sulliday" sounds less like an experimental pop song than a pop song that has been completely destroyed and turned inside out, leaving us with some strange other thing." (July/473)

12 *Cease & Resist: Sonic Subversion & Anarcho Punk In The UK 1979–86*
Various
(Optimo Music)

This collection by Optimo's JD Twitch and Chris Low conveyed both the essence and the overlooked subtleties of this oft-dismissed branch of punk, with experimentation from Annie Anxiety and D&V alongside rudimentary riffs and lyrics of squat life. Louis Pattison said: "Its detractors were not wrong: anarcho punk could be naive, hectoring, hopelessly idealistic – the very factors that allow these songs to endure." (July/473)

13 Frank Zappa
Funky Nothingness
(Zappa)

The Zappa vaults opened for this compilation of tracks recorded in 1970, with a post-*Hot Rats* group of Ian Underwood, Max Bennett, Aynsley Dunbar and Don 'Sugarcane' Harris jamming through a cover of Hank Ballard's "Work With Me Annie" and an early version of "Sharleena". Julian Cowley said: "Zappa's sheer love for music and the playing of it, the insatiable essence of his artistic libido, oozes from the grooves." (August/474)

14 The Replacements
Tim (Let It Bleed Edition)
(Sire/Rhino)

With a new mix by Ramones/Talking Heads engineer Ed Stasium that solved many of the issues with its original 1985 incarnation, The Replacements' fourth album threatened to topple its predecessor *Let It Be*'s crown in the Minneapolis quartet's catalogue. Stasium cleared out the mud, leaving new space for the group's ramshackle hymns to misspent youth, local bars and Peter Buck from REM's stinginess with speed.

15 Umeko Ando
Upopo Sanke
(Pingipung)

Recorded at Oki Kano's Chikar Studio a year before the singer's death in 2004, Umeko Ando's second studio album highlighted the traditions of Hokkaido, Japan's indigenous Ainu people, with accompaniment from Kano's stringed tonkori and Ainu vocal group Marewrew. Francis Gooding said: "*Upopo Sanke* finds past and present in intimately respectful dialogue, as the weft of Ando's voice moves through the warp of Oki Kano's tonkori." (October/476)

16 Pharoah Sanders
Pharoah
(Luaka Bop)

Rereleased with Sanders's posthumous blessing and including two bonus live performances of "Harvest Time", *Pharoah*'s no-frills recording captured the saxophonist at a transitional point between 1974's *Elevation* and subsequent more commercial fare. With players including guitarist Tisziji Muñoz, bassist Steve Neil and organist Clifton 'Jiggs' Chase, Sanders took the mic on "Love Will Find A Way", while his then-wife, pianist Bedria Sanders, played harmonium for the first time.

17 Lee/Hampel/Waisvisz/ Gosseye/Johansson
Scheiße 71
(Black Truffle)

Taking its name from a heckle as they performed at Berlin Jazzstage, *Scheiße 71* was the only recording of the quintet, with Jeanne Lee's free jazz vocals matched by oboe, flute, vibraphone, VCS3 synth and more. Stewart Smith said: "Waisvisz's static bursts, fizzy squelches and alien frequencies combine with Lee's exploratory vocals and Hampel's dreamy vibraphone to create a genuinely beautiful and otherworldly music." (September/475)

18 Ryuichi Sakamoto
Ongaku Zukan
(WeWantSounds)

Originally issued in 1984, the late composer's fourth solo album saw him explore the possibilities of the Fairlight CMI, with results weaving retro-futurist exotica, jazz rock and big band music around Sakamoto's classical touchstones. Andy Hamilton said: "The compositions give an impression of how Debussy might have sounded as a pop composer... it's an intriguing influence." (December/478)

19 Dorothy Ashby
With Strings Attached 1957–1965
(New Land)

Spanning from the simmering swing of her 1957 debut *The Jazz Harpist* to the emergent global perspective of 1965's *The Fantastic Jazz Harp Of Dorothy Ashby*, this six-LP set makes the case for much greater recognition of Ashby's work. Emily Pothast said: "A significant part of Ashby's legacy lies not in her recordings or compositions, but in her personal mentorship of a generation of jazz harpists that followed her." (August/474)

20 *The 12th Annual International Sound Poetry Festival*
Various
(Recital)

Organised by Charlie Morrow and Sten Hanson, the titular 1980 festival filled a Greenwich Village church with ten days of lingual innovation from Bob Cobbing, Carles Santos, John Giorno, Katalin Ladik, and many others. Morrow co-compiled this lengthy retrospective, which included a 238 page book. Julian Cowley said: "An essential resource for anyone seriously interested in the history and nature of sound poetry." (February/468)

21 Éliane Radigue
11 Dec 1980
(Important)

This remastered recording of a live radio session for Californian station KPFA featured what the composer considered to be the best performances of her pieces for ARP 2500, *Chry-Ptus* (originally recorded in 1971) and the more contemporary *Triptych*. Hannah Pezzack said: "Industrial and machinic, *Chry-Ptus* also conjures inherently ecological shapes and forms, the spiral of a nautilus shell or cresting waves, churning backwards and forwards." (October/476)

22 Stuart Dempster
Underground Overlays From The Cistern Chapel
(Important)

A member of Pauline Oliveros's Deep Listening Band, Dempster returned to the concrete cistern in Washington State where *Deep Listening* was recorded for this 1995 release, bathing listeners in its 45-second reverb through pieces for conch shell, trombone and didgeridoo. Xenia Benivolski said: "For Dempster, composition in the cistern is an exercise of arranging not only sounds, but profound modes of being." (October/476)

23 Derek Bailey & Paul Motian
Duo In Concert
(Frozen Reeds)

The free-improvising guitarist and the post-bop drummer found fertile common ground in this December 1990 performance (with a bonus 1991 New York set on the digital version), creating a dialogue of dynamism, elegance and mutual respect. Peter Margasak said: "There's no compromise in these meetings, nor is there any of the antagonism they were both capable of when encountering musicians who refused to listen." (December/478)

24 John Fahey
Proofs And Refutations
(Drag City)

This eight-track 1990s home recording collection provided a counter-narrative for the artist's final years, with Fahey adding a wordless growl inspired by throat singing to fractured guitar work and organ fuzz. Bill Meyer said: ""All The Rains" consists of nothing but bellow, echo and belligerence... it's astonishingly adversarial when you consider Fahey's records at the time had either been retreads of old ideas or actual rearrangements of golden oldies." (October/476)

25 Tricky
Maxinquaye (Reincarnated)
(Island/Universal)

The producer and MC's still-astonishing 1995 debut received an expanded reissue, with remixes, live and radio versions and six reinterpretations recorded in 2022. Michael A Gonzales said: "Whereas young Tricky built tracks that were chock full of samples and gritty sounds, the "Reincarnated" joints are stripped down, though "Strugglin'" does layer a head-nodding beat over the strange drone, whispery vocalist and Tricky groaning in the background." (November/477)

26 Laraaji
Segue To Infinity
(Numero Group)

The artist may still then have gone by Edward Larry Gordon, but these two side-length pieces from 1978's *Celestial Vibration* and six contemporaneous tracks retrieved from unreleased acetates showcase his signature shimmering zither mindscapes, with additional dreamy flute from Richard Cooper. Antonio Poscic said: "The six newly unearthed cuts are polaroids of Laraaji in moments of improvised musical meditation akin to dancers caught mid-motion." (February/468)

27 Brian Auger's Oblivion Express
Complete Oblivion
(Soul Bank)

Collecting all six LPs released by the group Brian Auger formed in 1970 after The Trinity split, *Complete Oblivion* showed the organist swiftly moving on from the previous decade's blues rock to embrace jazz, funk and soul. Dave Mandl said: "While the music is all over the map, barely recognisable as the work of the same leader from one album to the next, any number of high points stand out." (November/477)

28 Dawson
Discography+
(Sorcerer)

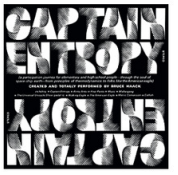
A high velocity collision of astringent hardcore, dub, hiphop and free jazz distinguished the trio fronted by longtime improvisor Jer Reid from their peers on Glasgow's early 1990s DIY scene. Honed live and expanded in the studio, their recorded catalogue was augmented here by previously unreleased live tracks. Stewart Smith said: "30 years on, the music still sounds thrilling, its ferocity and invention a testament to DIY creativity." (September/475)

29 Meat Joy
Meat Joy
(Flesh And Blood)

The sole 1984 album from the shortlived Austin, Texas group captured a joyfully scrappy collective sound that made them peers in spirit, if not geography, with Beat Happening, as well a shared irreverence towards notions of good taste with fellow Texans Butthole Surfers. Sam Davies said: "Switching freely between bare-bones acoustic confessional and scrawled electric blasts, there are uncanny glimpses along the way of sounds to come across the next decade." (October/476)

30 The Dream Syndicate
History Kinda Pales When It And You Are Aligned (The Days Of Wine And Roses 40th Anniversary Edition)
(Fire)

This expanded version of the Los Angeles outfit's 1982 debut album fleshed out its story with a wealth of live and rehearsal material, revealing the stylistic twists and turns behind its creation. Byron Coley said: "The Dream Syndicate's biggest form move has become lingua franca – unleashing electric guitar whack-offs inside a post-punk context." (September/475)



31 Bruce Haack
Captain Entropy
(Shimmy Disc)

Blending groovy music, self-built electronics and children's education, Canadian composer-musician Haack's 1974 LP offered a danceable take on physics principles. Spenser Tomson said: "Haack's narrative tone is what makes the record so compelling, offering up scientific metaphors with a spaced-outness which suggests he's turning on, tuning in and dropping out rather than attempting to describe the laws of classical thermodynamics to a child." (November/477)

32 Pauline Oliveros
The Well & The Gentle
(Important)

This 1984 set reflected Oliveros's collaborative and improvisational approach, with music developed with choreographer Deborah Hay and reimagined through performances by Philadelphia ensemble Relâche and by Oliveros on accordion in a Cologne water cistern. Xenia Benivolski said: "*The Well*'s fluttering composition responds to Hexagram 48 of the I Ching in a provocation that evokes the resilience of support structures and metaphorical meeting places." (September/475)

33 Andrew Poppy
Ark Hive Of A Live
(False Walls)

The composer's 40 year career received a generous four disc retrospective of previously unreleased live recordings. Rejecting chronology, each disc drew upon a mix of periods to highlight different outlets for his writing, from orchestral to electroacoustic. Brian Morton said: "The animating spirit is Poppy's protean musical imagination, as light as wings beating one moment, thunderous and dark the next." (April/470)

34 The Chills
Brave Words (Spoken Bravely: The Remix)
(Flying Nun/Fire)

Part of the wave of 1980s indie rock acts coming out of New Zealand via the Flying Nun label, the Dunedin group led by Martin Phillipps' 1987 debut was here bolstered by six extra tracks. Jon Dale said: "Several classics here – like "Night Of Chill Blue" and "Wet Blanket" – tower above the album's shortcomings, and the welcome expanded material on this reissue fleshes out the charms of *Brave Worlds*." (November/477)

35 Vivian Stanshall
Rawlinson's End
(Madfish)

An intended sequel to the Bonzo Dog Doo-Dah Band leader's surrealist magnum opus *Sir Henry At Rawlinson End* compiles Stanshall's tape archives with episodes from John Peel's radio show. Neil Kulkarni said: "The most complete realisation of Stanshall's meandering, magical, gut-bustingly hilarious series of vignettes about the residents of Rawlinson End, his tableaux of grotesques brought to life by his peerless narration and wonderfully woozy music." (August/474)

36 Ash Ra Tempel
Ash Ra Tempel
(MG Art)

Catalysed by West Berlin's Zodiak Free Arts Lab, the trio's 1971 debut saw them take cues from drummer Klaus Schulze's previous stint in Tangerine Dream but also establishing their own style, characterised by leader Manuel Göttsching's freewheeling cosmic guitar. Daniel Spicer said: ""Traummaschine" is a heavenly haze with delicate guitar motifs drifting in and out of the miasma, devoid of percussion save for a few echo-heavy bongo beats." (December/478)

37 *Playing For The Man At The Door: Field Recordings From The Collection Of Mack McCormick 1958–1971*
Various
(Smithsonian Folkways)

This treasury of gospel and blues was compiled from Robert Burton 'Mack' McCormick's field recordings from across the US south. Steve Barker said: "The real stars here are the artists whose names are unknown except to their families, friends, co-workers, fellow buskers, church congregants or bar and nightclub patrons in the communities where they performed." (September/475)

38 Movietone
Movietone
(World Of Echo)

Featuring many overlapping members of Bristol's musical community that included Crescent, Third Eye Foundation and Flying Saucer Attack, Movietone appeared most akin to the latter's introverted but noise-loving skygazing but quietly carved out their own niche. Softly spoken and heavy on atmosphere, their 1995 debut reappeared here with additional tracks, including both sides of the 1994 7" "She Smiled Mandarine Like".

39 Betty Davis
Betty Davis
(Light In The Attic)

Funk vocalist Davis received overdue recognition in the years before her 2022 death for her 1973 debut, recorded with a fine list of Bay Area musicians, including The Pointer Sisters and a pre-disco Sylvester backing up Davis's throaty vocals and raunchy swagger. Mosi Reeves said: "Davis imbues her grooves with real urgency. She's always in control, even when she's showing her ass." (December/478)

40 Ustad Zia Mohiuddin Dagar
Vrindavan 1982
(Black Truffle)

The 19th generation of a family of dhrupad musicians, Rajasthan born Zia Mohiuddin Dagar became a master of the rudra veena, a fretted Hindustani instrument with a gourd at each end of a resonant tube. This performance of the night time raga *Yaman Kalyan* showed his skills at their best, with lengthy, hypnotic improvisations building to an animated finale.

41 John McGuire
Vanishing Points/A Cappella
(Unseen Worlds)

John McGuire's mid-1980s work *Vanishing Points* saw the composer employing eight Yamaha DX7s to realise his vision that bridged minimalism and serialism. Julian Cowley said: "The vibrancy and vivid colouration of this music should appeal to devotees of Terry Riley's electronic keyboard excursions, while the voice of soprano Beth Griffith... may delight listeners who appreciate Steve Reich's brilliant integration of musicians within his ensemble music." (November/477)

42 Sun Ra & His Arkestra
Jazz In Silhouette Expanded Edition
(Cosmic Myth)

Dating from 1959, Sun Ra's third album found the bandleader's previous bop style starting its journey from earthbound Chicago into interstellar space, with tracks such as "Saturn" and "Ancient Aiethopia" signalling Ra's Afrofuturist intentions. Current bearer of the Arkestra light Marshall Allen made his debut here, while the bonus tracks include stereo versions of part of the album retrieved from the archives.

43 *À MOI LA LIBERTÉ, Early Electronic Raï, ALGERIE, 1983–1990*
Various
(Born Bad/Serendip Lab)

Originating in the Mediterranean melting-pot city of Oran, raï grew out of Algerian folk song, but evolved with its urban audience, offering gritty lyrics of working class life and colonial oppression and outraging the authorities with non-traditional morals. Thanks to producer Rachid Baba the keyboard-led version exploded in popularity in the 1980s, an era captured deftly on this compilation of the cheb/chaba (young) generation of raï musicians.

44 Count Ossie & The Mystic Revelation Of Rastafari
Tales Of Mozambique
(Soul Jazz)

Less celebrated than 1973's *Grounation*, *Tales Of Mozambique* continued the hypnotic nyahbinghi drumming of its predecessor, shifting the vocal focus to chanting augmented by bass, keys and horns. Steve Barker said: "In retrospect these albums can be rightfully placed in the Black consciousness movement spread around the world in the 1970s through the works of Ossie & Co, Linton Kwesi Johnson, Fela, Sun Ra, Jorge Ben et al." (March/469)

45 Suicide
A Way Of Life
(Mute)

Originally released in 1988 and produced by The Cars' Ric Ocasek, the New York duo's third studio album updated their sound for the 1980s; this reissue included an idiosyncratic live take on Springsteen's "Born In The USA". Noel Gardner said: "*A Way Of Life* teems with fine production touches, like the crisp, proto-techno synth line on "Sufferin' In Vain" and "Wild In Blue", which throbs with a greater depth than anything they'd previously done." (June/472)

46 Sonic Youth
Live In Brooklyn 2011
(Silver Current)

For their final US show at Williamsburg Waterfront, Sonic Youth delivered a set spanning from their earliest years to 2009's *The Eternal*. Neil Kulkarni said: "There's that great edge between recovery, ramshackleness and intuitive togetherness that feels like a last gasp, like the sight of the setting sun over the East River galvanised the four into a final cohesive statement and farewell." (October/476)

47 Pauline Anna Strom
Echoes, Spaces, Lines
(RVNG Intl)

Mixed from the original tape reels by Marta Salogni, *Echoes, Spaces, Lines* collected the Bay Area synth composer and healer's first three albums *Trans-Millennia Consort*, *Plot Zero* and *Spectre*, released between 1982–84. Physical editions added in a previously unreleased album from the same era, *Oceans Of Tears*.

48 Jacqueline Humbert & David Rosenboom
Daytime Viewing (1979–1980)
(Unseen Worlds)

A narrative song inspired by the appeal of daytime TV dramas to lonely viewers, *Daytime Viewing* explored similar terrain of mundanity and myth to Robert Ashley's *Perfect Lives–Private Parts*, for which Jacqueline Humbert designed costumes. David Rosenboom's electronic arrangements made use of Buchla's then cutting edge computer-controlled Touché synthesizer.

49 *Blacklips Bar: Androgyns & Deviants – Industrial Romance For Bruised And Battered Angels 1992–1995)*
Various
(Anthology)

Queer cabaret covers of Rolling Stones, AIDS-crisis vaudeville and transgressive club tracks were outlets for 1990s New York drag performance group Blacklips featuring ANOHNI. Claire Biddles said: "The authenticity and energy of the compilation comes from its inherent eclecticism, reflecting the mix 'n' match of styles, forms and characters that populate queer (artistic) spaces." (April/470)

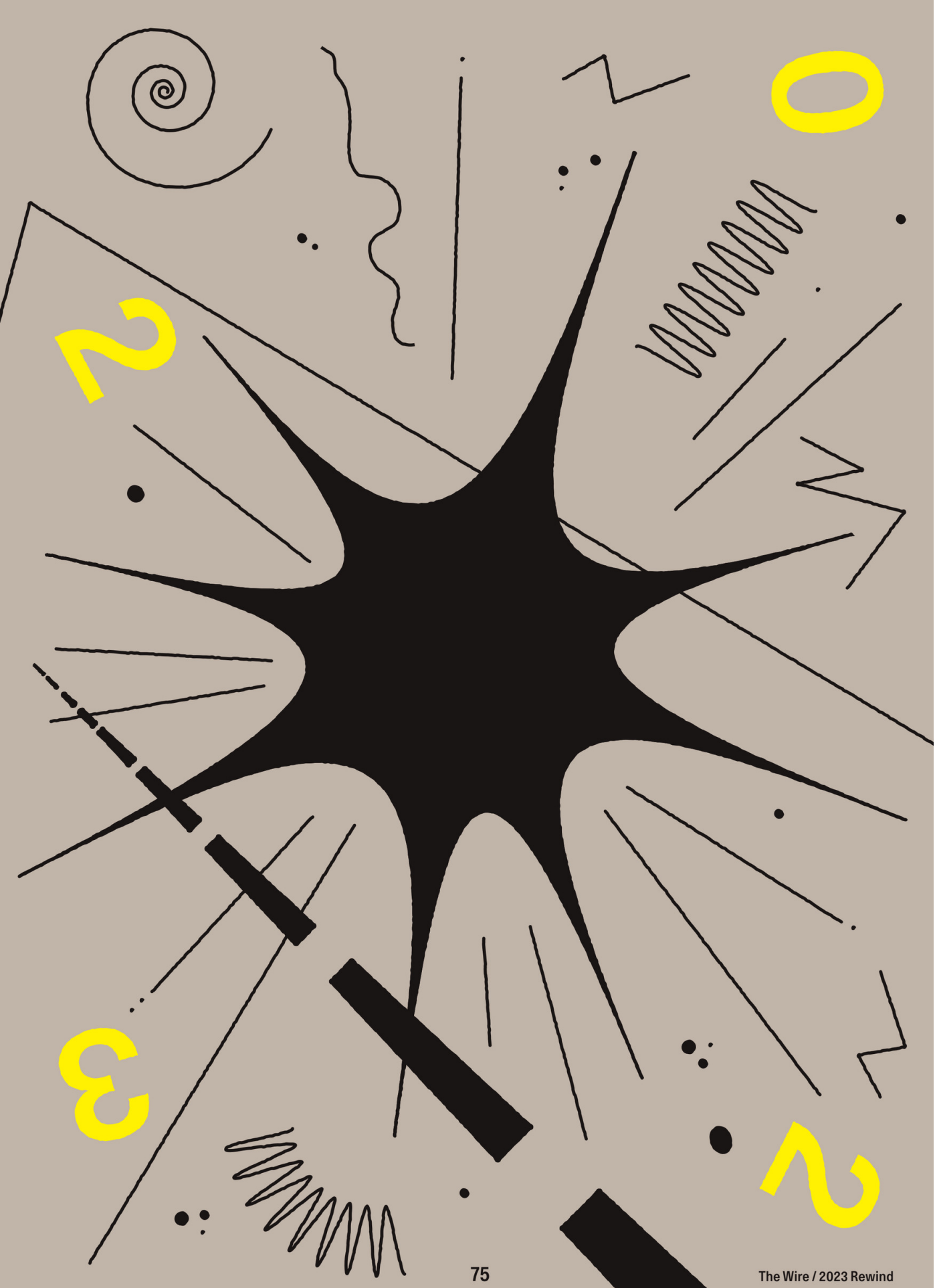
50 Harold Land
Damisi
(WeWantSounds)

The saxophonist's 1972 album combined his dark tenor tone with the influence of John Coltrane, accompanied by Oscar Brashear, Bill Henderson, Buster Williams and Ndugu Chancler. Andy Hamilton said: "*Damisi* has a jazz funk reputation, but the slow funk of "In The Back, In The Corner, In The Dark" and the more muscular "Chocolate Mess" are the only examples – brilliant ones though." (August/474)

The Electorate

This year's chart was compiled from the votes of the following contributors and staff (each voter's individual release of the year is shown in brackets)

Yewande Adeniran (Sonic Youth *Bad Moon Rising*)
Vanessa Ague (Arthur Russell *Picture Of Bunny Rabbit*)
Robert Barry (Various *The NID Tapes: Electronic Music From India 1969–1972*)
Clive Bell (Yumiko Tanaka *Tayutauta*)
Xenia Benivolski (Stuart Dempster *Underground Overlays From The Cistern Chapel*)
Emily Bick (Carl Stone *Electronic Music From 1972–2022*)
Claire Biddles (The Replacements *Tim (Let It Bleed Edition)*)
Philip Clark (Pharoah Sanders *Pharoah*)
Julian Cowley (Various *The 12th International Sound Poetry Festival*)
Raymond Cummings (Autechre *AE_Live 2022*)
Jon Dale (Mouse On Mars *Bilk*)
Phil Freeman (Hawkwind *Space Ritual: 50th Anniversary Edition*)
Noel Gardner (Datblygu *Terfysgiaith 1982–2022*)
Francis Gooding (Ara Tokatlian & Enrique Villegas *Inspiración)*
Kurt Gottschalk (Various *Dance Craze*)
George Grella (Thomas Buckner *Spontaneous Musical Invention: Thomas Buckner Sings Robert Ashley*)
Louise Gray (Annea Lockwood *Glass World*)
David Grundy (Abdul Wadud *By Myself*)
Andy Hamilton (Max Roach *Members, Don't Git Weary*)
Tony Herrington (Milford Graves with Arthur Doyle & Hugh Glover *Children Of The Forest*)
Jo Hutton (Chris Cutler *Compositions & Collaborations 1972–2022*)
Leah Kardos (Ryuichi Sakamoto *Ongaku Zukan*)
Biba Kopf (Umeko Ando *Upopo Sanke*)
Neil Kulkarni (Anadol *Hatıralar*)
Dave Mandl (Various *One Minute From Heaven*)
Peter Margasak (Abdul Wadud *By Myself*)
Marc Masters (Meat Joy *Meat Joy*)
Ryan Meehan (The Replacements *Tim (Let It Bleed Edition)*)
Noel Meek (Milford Graves with Arthur Doyle & Hugh Glover *Children Of The Forest*)
Bill Meyer (Milford Graves with Arthur Doyle & Hugh Glover *Children Of The Forest*)
John Morrison (Nina Simone *You've Got To Learn*)
Joe Muggs (Joni Mitchell *The Joni Mitchell Archives Vol 3: The Asylum Years (1972–1975)*)
Louis Pattison (Karate *Complete Studio Recordings*)
Antonio Poscic (Carl Stone *Electronic Music From 1972–2022*)
Emily Pothast (Milford Graves with Arthur Doyle & Hugh Glover *Children Of The Forest*)
Edwin Pouncey (Milford Graves with Arthur Doyle & Hugh Glover *Children Of The Forest*)
Simon Reynolds (Various *Cease & Resist: Sonic Subversion & Anarcho Punk In The UK 1979–86*)
Ilia Rogatchevski (Phew *Our Likeness*)
Dave Segal (Techno Animal *Re-Entry*)
Stewart Smith (Dawson *Discography*)
Daniel Spicer (John Coltrane with Eric Dolphy *Evenings At The Village Gate*)
Joseph Stannard (Tricky *Maxinquaye*)
Spenser Tomson (Phauss *Audiodrome*)
Rob Turner (Various *Wattstax 72 Soul'd Out: The Complete Collection*)
Derek Walmsley (John Coltrane with Eric Dolphy *Evenings At The Village Gate*)
Shane Woolman (Carl Stone *Electronic Music From 1972–2022*)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Soundcheck A–Z

New CDs, vinyl, cassettes, downloads & streams

Aesop Rock
Integrated Tech Solutions
Rhymesayers CD/DL/LP/MC
Aesop Rock's tenth studio album – his first for three years – welcomes back regular collaborator Rob Sonic alongside turns from billy woods, Hanni El Khatib, Lealani Teano and Nikki Jean. Refracted, bitcrushed synths and squeezed bass notes make appearances throughout its production, predominantly by Aesop himself, thrown in among Foley samples, trumpets, drums, vocal chops and strings to form the record's ever-mutating sound.

Integrated Tech Solutions opens and ends with the disclaimer it is *"not a cult"* spoken in Aesop's distinctive wry intonation – his New York husk sped up to add an automated fine print twist to the voice. The line is an acknowledgment of the ensuing dense verbiage. Words are difficult to decipher on first listen (not unlike his previous output), as he picks up and discards reference points on a whim. Like a drone scouring a language junkyard, his visual feeds constantly zoom in and out between micro and macro states. The lyrical focus – on accelerationist states of rapid technological growth – suits his careering flow. The album title itself is a cynical play on tech companies that foster an impenetrable veneer around themselves, much like a cult. Aesop spews the bloated corporate speak of these companies across the album, turning it in on itself to highlight its sinister absurdity.

It feels like an obvious critique. Yet Aesop's penchant for storytelling – particularly on "100 Feet Tall" and "Aggressive Steven" – is still incredibly engaging, delivering a fraught narrative that touches on mental health, exploitation of the vulnerable and human responses to corporate stimuli.
Misha Farrant

Agitation Free
Momentum
MIG CD/DL/2xLP
Agitation Free belong to the celebrated Berlin school of 1970s German experimental music along with such familiar names as Tangerine Dream and Ash Ra Tempel. For many, their 1972 debut album *Malesch* made the most impact, but since then the band have drifted in and out of existence with various line-up changes, and have now formed a creative partnership that has lasted since 2013.

For their first studio album in two decades they mostly abandon past glories and opt for a sleek, electroglide approach – a Mahavishnu Orchestra style prog rock fusion colliding with the soundtrack for some imaginary multi-levelled gaming adventure. Echoes of Agitation Free's earlier period surface on the opening "Nouveaux Son" where a sampled French spoken description of the group is programmed into a robotic blare of edgy guitar and whipcrack drum beats.

Elsewhere on "Levant" and the kosmischely spiced "Shibuya", they flashback to the *Malesch* era with alternating ethnological tinged keyboard and guitar themes, reigniting shades of the Middle Eastern tour the group embarked upon as part of their musical learning curve in the early 70s. This mood extends through the following "Nightwatch" where, accompanied by a prerecorded frog chorus, they slide into a psychedelic undercurrent of backwards guitars and swampy bass undulations.

Momentum is packed with such atmospheric scenarios, all of which initially sound preposterously over the top – until repeated listening reveals the intricacy of the group, both as highly skilled individual players in their own right and as the working cogs in a tightly disciplined music machine.
Edwin Pouncey

All Men Unto Me
In Chemical Transit
Bandcamp CD/DL
When taking a course of testosterone, the voice drops. For the Edinburgh based classically trained singer (and avant metal band Ashenspire's live frontman) Rylan Gleave, this was a turbulent time, but also an opportunity to observe the process.
Throughout *In Chemical Transit*, he stitches together archival recordings of his developing vocal chords; after eight weeks, one year and 18 months on hormones (as well as one pre-transition recording). This album is a testament to nonlinear metamorphosis, an unflinching look at imperfections throughout a mammoth change.

The latest recordings (two and a half years into his transition) were undertaken over three hours in The Royal Conservatoire of Scotland in 2021. Rylan's most recent vocals are rough and you can hear the shape of the room in tracks such as "How To Hold It". "I Seek Something (Outside Of Myself)" is full of the sort of vocal breaks which Gleave admits some might find ugly. Nevertheless they suffuse this piece, and indeed the album, with honesty and vulnerability.

In Chemical Transit's interlude brings us the earliest recording (eight weeks). Rylan attempts to practice an aria for his impending exam but lacks the range. For comparison, we hear extracts from the same aria during the album's final track "Senza Saper", the only pre-transition recording on the album. If there's a sense of mourning as we reflect on what Rylan is leaving behind, there's a greater sense of hope and determination as we move towards Rylan's new voice (indeed, just before the album's release show, Rylan humorously mused that he was no longer able to sing many of the parts on this album).

The sounds shared on *In Chemical Transit* present a brave, fascinating and triumphant view of transition. It documents a metamorphosis undertaken not without trepidation, but with much curiosity and honesty.
Rosie Esther Solomon

Alternative TV
Direct Action
Fourth Dimension DL/LP
Andy Blade & Buddies
Being Alive Is Fun
Holy Dotage DL/LP
Founded in 1977 by former bank clerk and punk rock chronicler Mark Perry (whose *Sniffin' Glue* fanzine was responsible for documenting the inception of the UK punk rock scene) Alternative TV deliberately set out to avoid falling into the corporate trap laid by the music industry at the time by taking a more experimental, anti-new wave approach.

This fully came to fruition on 1979's *Vibing Up The Senile Man (Part One)*, on which ATV pushed new found sounds around the studio floor rather than simply railing against the state of the nation one more time. Forever exploring, the following decades saw Perry and his disparate group of musicians producing a steady stream of recordings that befuddled punk purists, but opened up exciting portals of discovery for anyone willing to think outside the box. This latest collection is probably ATV's best shot yet, a tightly packed selection of involving instrumental pieces that sound detached from punk's primal rage, while still retaining its fiercely independent spirit.

Packaged inside a simple black cover with white lettering, the overall look of *Direct Action* has more than a whiff of Whitehouse to it – while the music is equally in key with such UK industrial and experimental noisemakers as Psychic TV, Nurse With Wound and The Shadow Ring. One burning example of how Perry's creative mindset has expanded can be found on "Saudade", a lengthy drone piece with a blurred vocal cocooned inside; "Free The Nipple", meanwhile, sounds like an extract from an early AMM rehearsal. Equally out there is the title track, which gradually dissolves into a locked groove of muted feedback and sonic decay like some incoming transmission from another planet.

One group that Perry covered in *Sniffin' Glue* was Eater, whose lead vocalist Andy Blade decided to go solo once the major labels moved in on the original punk scene. His latest sees him in the company of such comrades in arms as Damned drummer Rat Scabies and Generation X guitarist Derwood Andrews, together with longterm group member Katerina Sharkova and a host of co-creators and vocalists. Like Perry, Blade has since sloughed off his old skin, ditching safety-pinned punk for T-Rex glam on the excellent "You're Strange" and throwing Sparks cover

"Girl From Germany" into the works like a glitter-covered spanner. Blade's songs ring of rebirth and rebellion against being creatively pigeonholed – letting everything flow without selling out.

Edwin Pouncey

Chino Amobi
French Extremism
Bandcamp DL

Like his 2017 opus *Paradiso* – which gained top position in *The Wire*'s Rewind releases in issue 407 – Chino Amobi's new set is a driving, jarring force of nature, the perfect soundtrack to an apocalypse.

Afro-diasporic beats and crunchy electronic dance music compete with news reports, further obfuscated by sounds of helicopters and police cruisers. A torrent of seemingly televised information is all but swallowed by urgent industrial gabber that fades in and out of sync with slow, unbearably dense rap verses, each drawn-out breath advancing further into toxic sonic territory.

A siren swells, a wolf howls, a woman screams but no one is listening: everyone is dancing. Baroque harpsichords mock the snooty, frantic babble of a news reporter. Femme whispers glitch and frazzle, until, disjointed beyond recognition, they sound like the buzzing of a rattlesnake. Sirens blare over a hyper agitated public speaker, spurred by shouting, chanting crowds while trucks rev up in the distance. It's a party at the end of time, a mechanical swan song to a dying world.

Tender and surprisingly human transitions modulate between these horrifying vignettes. While some tracks fade into amorous moans and sighs, others allow the organic, acoustic sound of uneven drumming to briefly emerge. Amobi has experimented with conceptual covers (an early project was a noise-inspired remix of Michael Jackson's "They Don't Care About Us") and worked with the likes of Elysia Crampton Chuquimia and Ryan Trecartin – media archeologists who scavenge vast fields of technological refuse and assemble new meanings from the shattered fragments of contemporary humanity. On *French Extremism* he has created a historical opera powered by a multitude of disconnected voices, machines and entities.

Xenia Benivolski

André 3000
New Blue Sun
Epic DL/3xLP

André 3000 is one half of Outkast, the chart topping, multi-Grammy winning rap duo from Atlanta. Since 2006's *Idlewild* soundtrack there's been no new Outkast material, though André has contributed verses to other artists' releases. So a fresh André album is hotly anticipated, even as some might be surprised that it's an entirely instrumental, flute-led, new age excursion with nary a rap to be heard. "Warning: No Bars" winks the cover sticker.

André comes clean with the opening track's title, "I Swear, I Really Wanted To Make A 'Rap' Album But This Is Literally The Way The Wind Blew Me This Time". A warm, furry keyboard offers a series of chords – in another context, this would work well as a pop song. Percussion and effects decorate the scene. After three minutes, André joins on digital wind instrument, a smooth, calming flute sound that pipes a melody and improvises delicately till 12 minutes are up. It's all well played and lusciously presented, and if you're meditating to the album, little here will disrupt your vibe.

The glossy perfection of digital wind is fine up to a point, but fortunately André also loves to huff down some physical wooden instruments. He has a double flute that plays in fifths, sounding medieval, and it features on "That Night In Hawaii When I Turned Into A Panther And Started Making These Low Register Purring Tones That I Couldn't Control... Sh¥t Was Wild". Co-producer Carlos Niño colours the world with percussion. The title references an ayahuasca trip and André is credited with Panther Toning.

André has a collection of 40 flutes and has often been spotted playing them in Los Angeles streets or cafes. He claims inspiration from John Coltrane, but Don Cherry used to play while out walking, Pied Piper style. Likewise Shabaka Hutchings, another musician badly bitten by the flute bug. In fact, an apposite companion to *New Blue Sun* would be Hutchings's 2022 solo album *Afrikan Culture*.

André nods to his times of depression in the track title "BuyPoloDisorder's Daughter Wears A 3000® Button Down Embroidered". But *New Blue Sun* shows him humble, at peace and happily blowing with friends.

Clive Bell

Anenon
Moons Melt Milk Light
Tonal Union DL/LP

Anenon is the ongoing solo studio and live project of Los Angeles based producer and saxophonist Brian Allen Simon, who has been releasing intriguing music since 2010. Unlike previous releases like 2018's *Tongue* and 2016's *Petrol*, he departs entirely from electronics here, with an almost entirely acoustic approach which blends piano, tenor sax, bass clarinet and field recordings. The result is completely modern but lit like stained glass, everything improvised and recorded as either a first or second take with no edits, any layering or mixing happening in the moment.

That reductiveness has focused Simon's work, giving emphasis to the individual sound components, their qualities of resonance and how they get affected in combination. The piano on tracks like "Untitled Skies" and "Maine Piano" is softened, blurred at the edges with a seemingly constantly depressed mute pedal, and performs perhaps the most conventional moves, threading melodies into the mix and picking out fragmentary shards of suggested melodies and chords, and, occasionally, Alice Coltrane-like ripples of drone. The found sounds seem to be stolen impressions of a moment – wind, rustling leaves, water fowl, rain, occasional voices – culled from recordings Simon made in London, Auvergne and Maine. The aspect that keeps things compelling as opposed to merely tasteful is the horn parts – if permitted, for instance, "Night Painting I" may inhabit your home and head with a dreamy, soundtrack-like sense of contemplation and poignancy.

The only problem here is that often the sound and tunes stray close to the kind of neoclassical politeness that is difficult to be moved by – you start feeling like you're inhabiting an advert – but the LP's fluid, characterful horn playing keeps luring you back in. It'd be great if next time Simon opted to problematise this exact mix of sounds with a dose of dissonance.

Neil Kulkarni

Daniel Bachman
When The Roses Come Again
Three Lobed CD/DL/LP

Self-recorded by Daniel Bachman on the border of Virginia's Shenandoah National Park, the US musician borrowed the cabin in which he was working as a carpenter's assistant to produce *When The Roses Come Again*, a set of pieces which blend the sounds of his picked guitar with expansive electronic drones. This initially makes me think of *For Emma, Forever Ago*, Justin Vernon's first release under the Bon Iver moniker and always the first 'creative isolation in a wood cabin' record that springs to mind.

However, where Vernon's album registers like a melancholic exorcism of listless youth and failed relationships, Bachman does not engage in that kind of soul searching, though he elicits a similarly potent emotional response. "Neath The Shadow, Down The Meadow" opens with a spooked out sound wash, devoid of his earthy strings, like an electronic inhalation in anticipation of their arrival, before they eventually drift into "Leaves Lying On Each Side". The combination of bucolic twangs from his modified banjo and the verdant electronic haze which drifts throughout conjures a crepuscular North American pastoral, like peering out into dawn wilderness from beneath the dim shine of the cabin's low-watted lamp.

What he finds, however, as the album progresses through the wide horizons of "I Must Leave You Someone's Saying" and "Happy Hearts That Feel No Pain", is positivity and light, his rolling guitar lines evoking a landscape emerging from nocturnality. In the hands of Vernon, the metaphor of the closing track might provide a chance to wallow and revel in the bittersweet introspection offered by rugged isolation. But in the hands of Bachman, his earthy guitar and verdant electronics feel connected to the place in which they were created, warmed by the optimism of a landscape and a season in change.

Spenser Tomson

BEAM SPLITTER + Eivind Lønning & Espen Reinertsen
Beauties
Neither/Nor CD/DL

Beauties opens with a soft explosion of blubber and pucker. Just how those noises were made might be hard to guess, but there's no doubt that human tissues were folded and stretched in the process. In short order, the sounds change, and they keep on changing. Identifiable instruments manifest, mostly extended techniques become apparent, but the uncertainty never fades. What are we

Making light work: Myra Melford's Fire & Water Quintet

A new work from US pianist Myra Melford displays her continued brilliance as soloist and leader

By Kurt Gottschalk

Myra Melford's Fire & Water Quintet
Hear The Light Singing
RogueArt CD/DL

As far back as 1990 and her first record, a trio with bassist Lindsey Horner and drummer Reggie Nicholson, American pianist Myra Melford has shown a keen sensibility for putting bands together. Not in the instrumentation – a piano trio was hardly unheard of – but in the playing personalities of the musicians. Melford's ensembles without fail are comprised of talented soloists who put the creation of a collective voice first. And just as her chosen instrumentations neither rely upon nor disavow convention, her compositions aren't typical heads for soloing but do feature the individual players prominently.

The instrumentation for Melford's Fire & Water Quintet – saxophone, guitar, cello, piano and drums – is less common than the traditional piano trio; Melford doesn't seek to break with tradition any more than she looks to adhere to it. The five compositions on *Hear The Light Singing* are all hers, and it's her name up before the band's. But even more so than on their 2022 debut *For The Love Of Fire And Water*, their latest album is an ensemble effort. The new pieces – titled "Insertions" – were written during the course of touring the previous record and played in concert between the older ones. The two albums comprise a sort of staggered suite, with both collections based on the same set of Cy Twombly drawings.

There's likewise something not quite conventional about the compositions – not that they're stridently unconventional. But more significantly, the pieces are rich and enigmatic and certainly generous. All of the players are given warm spotlights, putting each at their best. It's not a succession of concertos for individual cooties, but it does work well as Melford's gifts to her musicians. And with a band of such popular players, it's a gift to listeners as well. Beyond the space for soloing, Melford makes the most of the small group with deft orchestration, turning and tuning the group to support the solo statements. Cellist Tomeka Reid is featured on "Insertion Two" for example, opening the piece with a beautifully played, unaccompanied and lyrical solo that is promptly made downright poignant by Melford's own complements. At some length, Lesley Mok's gentle cymbal work cues group dynamic and Ingrid Laubrock steps in with a saxophone solo that elegantly picks up where Reid dropped off. Two thirds of the way through the track, Mary Halvorson's guitar seems to summarise and build upon both the cello and saxophone parts that had come before, the piano continuing apace. When Reid returns in the final minute, sharing a melody line with Melford, the piece grows rich with a layered complexity of feeling.

The album's 18 minute centrepiece "Insertion Three" gets surprisingly noisy before opening up for a wonderful solo from Mok, beginning with soft mallets that call to mind Susie Ibarra (who previously held the drum chair in the band) but ramping up to sticks with knotty duos – drums and guitar, drums and cello – and ensemble interjections. It's a fantastic sequence of band choreography and a good introduction to Mok, certainly the least known name in the band at the moment (a state of affairs that'll almost certainly change soon).

Halvorson is heard prominently throughout the album, no doubt in part because her playing is so recognisable – is any other guitarist since Robert Fripp so immediately discernible just from their use of electronic effects? She is given her solo in "Insertion Four", which also includes some of the loveliest melodies on the album. Halvorson begins with a gentle blizzard before tracing lines in the air, massaging and reshaping them. She's a strong tunesmith herself, but also a great interpreter, and Melford writes with keen insight into her syntax.

It's an upbeat and often joyful album that's not without surprises and mood swings. The concluding track is an unexpectedly sombre vehicle for Laubrock, whose playing is thoughtful, contemplative and sometimes in whispers, but culminating in uplifting ensemble refrains, Laubrock playing against the tide. Melford gives herself the opening scene, like a host introducing her guests, beginning unaccompanied in jetties that suggest common directives. Coming later in its eight minutes, a quick duo by Laubrock and Reid is packed with events and instrumental oratory that suggest early on how many directions the group can move in. The band are plainly dedicated to delivering the material.

Time and again over the last three-plus decades, Myra Melford has managed to maintain a middle ground – between traditional and radical, between chamber music and vamps for soloists, between fire and water. And time and again, she has done so magnificently. *Hear The Light Singing* is the latest documentary evidence from a musician who manages to be at once a confident soloist and a selfless leader. ●

Don Dixon

hearing? Should we be listening? Should they be letting us? As friction overtakes breath and slippery tones slip through thickets of wet hiss and hock, the feeling grows that the album's two not quite 20 minute improvisations are letting us in on something very intimate.

But impressions can't always be trusted, since the situation that gave rise to this music involved the dissolution of pre-existing connections. The session involved the members of BEAM SPLITTER (Audrey Chen, voice and electronics; Henrik Munkeby Nørstebø on trombone and electronics) and Streifenjunko (Eivind Lønning, trumpet and electronics; Espen Reinertsen, tenor saxophone and electronics) retiring to an old building in remote Hemnes, Norway. But rather than set up together or a duo versus duo, they scattered to different rooms. It's a bit ironic that music that sounds like the result of shared writhing was actually made by people who were not in the same room, even though they were all playing at the same time.

Chen's amplified voice, which ranges from pre-verbal rudiments to simulated speech, tends to dominate the action, since in a field of activity full of extended techniques and processed signals, there's never any doubt that it is exactly what it sounds like – a human being making mouth sounds. But that irreducible quality extends to the music as a whole; it creates its own form.

Bill Meyer

Beans
ZWAARD
Tygr Rawwk DL

New York rapper Robert 'Beans' Stewart's first project since 2020 is a collaboration with Finnish musician Sasu 'Vladislav Delay' Ripatti. Both artists have esteemed pedigrees – Beans's turn of the century rap outfit Antipop Consortium marked a high point in leftfield hiphop experimentation, while Ripatti helped pioneer microhouse as Luomo on his 2000 classic *Vocalcity*. Last summer, Antipop Consortium — Beans along with Hprizm, M Sayyid and engineer Earl Blaize — reunited for a handful of highly publicised shows. The nostalgia generated by those performances, as well as the three rappers' appearance on *ZWAARD*, has helped draw attention to Beans's underrated solo discography.

All the songs here bear the album's title – "ZWAARD 1", "ZWAARD 2", and so on. The opening track bursts with an electronic fanfare from Ripatti as Beans boasts, *"When I die, burn my ashes and press them up in the vinyl of my latest release so I can die as I live creatively"*. His flow is reminiscent of Kool Keith, and he excels at pocking his verses with a handful of standout bars. Examples include *"Everybody is G-O-D, growing old and dying"* from "ZWAARD 1", where Beans references Five Percenter slang, and *"I'm your most highly irregular eraser maker"* from "ZWAARD 7". He tends to structure every song as a battle rap filled with ad hoc disses. But his approach also seems like a way to play with language. Why else would he chant *"Y'all ain't touchin' me/I'm Captain Leprosy"*?

Meanwhile, Ripatti accompanies Beans with jutting electronic rhythms and flurries. His beat on "ZWAARD 7" evokes German producer Pole's mid-2000s dub tracks with Ohio's Fat Jon The Ample Soul Physician, and "ZWAARD 2" has a percussiveness reminiscent of 1980s synthwave. Ripatti claims three instrumental showcases for himself and one of them, "ZWAARD 13", resembles South African amapiano.

Throughout the record, Beans seems keenly aware that he's pushing 50. *"I'm still writing better than rappers half my age"*, he argues. But kids these days care more about vibes, flows and cadences than elucidating the perfect taunt. Part of the album's appeal stems from Beans and Ripatti's defiance in the face of neglect. Still, when Beans raps *"Need somebody to love you? Invest in a mirror"*, one can't help wondering if he's battling himself.

Mosi Reeves

Lea Bertucci
Of Shadow And Substance
Cibachrome CD/DL/LP

This new LP from New York based composer Lea Bertucci consists of two longform commissions for chamber ensemble. Performed by Quartetto Maurice, with Bertucci in control of the spatial mixing, "Vapours" is quivering and lean. Scratchy strings fidget and groan like rusty hinges; rustling tremolo textures seethe and itch in agitated flurries, or stretch out in slender arco drones across superimposed fifths.

From these hollow, austere clusters emerge strident tones, shrill harmonics, eruptions of savage violence. Inspired in part by the archaic term used to diagnose nervousness or hysteria in women, and in part by the diffusion of matter into air, the piece exerts presence that is alive and trembling. It is brilliantly executed and, in places, genuinely frightening. Yawning drones and hissing percussive swells open the gates to chaos in "Of Shadow And Substance", an epic 21 minute churn of layered tape loops, cello and bass strings, harp and percussion, commissioned by the Philadelphia based ARS Nova Workshop.

The instrumental textures are visceral, ragged and taut, what the composer aptly describes as "bow on bone". Waves of intense, shuddering noise swell dangerously large before receding back to scrapes and animalistic whines. At the midway point the music bottoms out on a drone so black and malevolent, it's like listening to the groaning of ancestral bones from deep in the Earth's crust. The piece is more haunted and atmospherically dense than its predecessor, however both pieces share a remarkable sense of immediacy.

In the sleevenotes Bertucci is quoted saying, "I don't feel that these works belong to me. There is something about them that is beyond myself... [They provide] a brief glimpse into what it is to be human in what feels like these waning days of the Anthropocene." There is a feral sense of nihilism and danger here, but there's also tenderness – across turbulent, shapeshifting intensities, the composer remains focused on the fragile, organic edges of things.

Leah Kardos

Galya Bisengalieva
Polygon
One Little Independent DL/LP

With *Polygon*, Kazakh-British violinist and composer Galya Bisengalieva evokes the desolation of the Semipalatinsk test site, a rural location on the northeastern corner of the Kazakh Steppe, officially classed as uninhabited, where some 456 nuclear weapon tests were conducted by the Soviet Union during the Cold War. It is thought that over a million people were exposed to radiation in the zone known as The Polygon, and still today there are people living there who remain burdened by the effects of nuclear fallout.

Bisengalieva's music evokes imagery of decay and desolation, the sound of contamination being carried on the winds of the steppe. Each track is named after a geographical location within The Polygon – ghost towns, unnatural lakes formed of bomb explosions, irradiated mountains. Bisengalieva's violin is all at once beautiful, haunted and mutated – earthy drones, woozy portamento slides, dissonant clusters and the silent scream of violin harmonics are treated with creative signal processing to suggest both the ghostly beauty of the natural landscape as well as the toxic effects of nuclear radiation. The occasional throb and gurgle of subtle electronics enlivens a sense of the evolving present and the biological life that has survived, resilient but altered, effects still ongoing.

The seven track suite opens with the scarred sonic vista of "Alash-kala", a disquieting, wintry drone that itches with rusty tremolos and electrical surges. "Polygon" gathers gently shuddering static and long, tired-sounding open fifths, slowly creeping higher and tighter, a slow motion tension so heightened that it diffuses into vapour. The wonky sensations of "Balapan" offer a rhythmic reprieve, bringing the themes of *Polygon* down to the body where they can be felt differently.

The finale "Degelen" is the work's most devastating moment, a scattering of animalistic calls that slowly become subsumed by a subterranean harmonic churn, suggesting a deep, slow-moving violence.

Leah Kardos

Black To Comm
At Zeenath Parallel Heavens
Thrill Jockey CD/DL/LP
Alphabet 1968
Cellule 75 CD/DL/LP
Earth
Cellule 75 CD/DL/LP
Marc Richter
Coh Bâle
Cellule 75 DL/LP

The latest batch from German musician Marc Richter includes a new album under his regular Black To Comm moniker. The mellow ambient textures that open *At Zeenath Parallel Heavens* suggest that the unsettling rumble of previous releases has morphed into something more radiant and calm, approaching an almost beatific feel.

The serenity introduced by "Then Began The Harp To Fashion" is deepened by second

Onda doesn't rush through each recording, staying with chunks of Spanish singing, English news and German chat long enough to submerge us in the moment. On "Part I" a slight frequency drift causes voices to reverberate as though submerged in deep radio waves. Rather than straining to hear the dialogue, the instinct is to go with the disruption, melt into the reverie of Onda's captured memory and bask in the warm FM textures of wobble and crackle slowly unravelling. Where Schofield uses decay of personal artefacts to excavate emotional resonances, Onda freezes them like insects captured in amber, rescuing the moment – and the memory – from radio transience.

Spenser Tomson

Amelia Cuni/Werner Durand/Uli Hohmann
Clearing
Aguirre DL/LP

Timelash
Feral Lands & Forbidden Cities
Aguirre DL/LP

Ordeal
Vätterns Pärla
Aguirre DL/LP

Werner Durand is a Berlin based composer and instrument maker, Amelia Cuni a Milan born vocalist working in the Indian dhrupad style. The pair have worked together for some 20 years, operating both as a duo and in groups such as Tonaliens and Born Of Six. *Clearing* finds them joined by the percussionist Uli Hohmann, who brings with him a variety of hand drums from the Middle East and North Africa. These four extended tracks feed off of familiar traditions, but the trio's unorthodox approach nudges *Clearing* in the direction of somewhere distinctly otherworldly.

Cuni feeds her vocals through a mirliton, a membranophone that wreathes her undulating vocal in fuzz, while Durand shuffles through a variety of wind instruments – soprano sax, kalima and his own home built PVC clarinet – to create long, sinuous drones that feel infused with a sense of the numinous, devotional music from a society either forgotten, or as yet undiscovered.

A similar worldbuilding spirit guides *Feral Lands & Forbidden Cities*, the second in a projected four-part series by Timelash (Chilean musician Nicolás Carcavilla aka Embassador Dulgoon alongside Psychic Sounds label co-founder Grant Corum). Tracks like "Primal Plateau" and "Chalkwing's Floating Pagoda" feel like attempts to summon complex topographies or alien civilisations into being through dramatic synth swells, exotic melodies, gamelan rhythms and a clamour of organic croaks, creaks and cries that imply the presence of teeming life. It's often playful in tone, but Timelash are adept in conjuring a sense of grandeur – see the sci-fi court music of "Outside Grottos Of Time" or "Shadows Of The Skyfish", which concludes with a blaze of guitar pyrotechnics.

A key node in the current Gothenburg underground focused around the labels Discreet and Forlag För Fri Musik, Dan Johansson has been absurdly prolific over the last few years, pumping out harsh noise as Sewer Election while contributing to groups like Enhet För Fri Musik, Neutral and Amateur Hour. Well, here's another project to add to the pile. As Ordeal, Johansson explores a bummed out synth noise indebted to the peerlessly gloomy early work of industrial malcontent Maurizio Bianchi – think the hum of a possessed fridge, or a particularly malevolent ceiling fan. "Huggormen" and "Vist" have a decrepit, claustrophobic feel that is only enhanced by the wobby tape-fi fidelity, giving the sense of a music that is decomposing in real time. But these are perfect sounds to wallow in – live with its churn of sombre desolation and what *Vätterns Pärla* offers begins to feel oddly comforting.

Louis Pattison

Angharad Davies & Phil Julian
Neutral Red
Fataka CD/DL

On her astonishing 2021 solo album *Gwneud A Gwneud Eto* Welsh violinist Angharad Davies created a truly psychedelic experience by leaning into the most microscopic sounds she could muster. She wedged a nail file within the instrument's strings and embarked on a stunning 52 minute journey where constantly morphing striations of the most reduced gestures opened up a new world of sound, which she further embellished on a second pass while listening to the first recording on headphones.

Davies applies the same ideas – albeit while using amplification – in this duo with veteran electronic improvisor Phil Julian, who proves to be a sympathetic partner. Each musician conjures seriously granular sounds, doubling down on the subtlest of movement to create music that becomes all-enveloping despite its triumphant smallness. The violinist's mastery of bow pressure and tonal gradation allows every stroke to transform the grain of her violin into abstract sobs, asides, and jabs.

Julian presents Davies with an ever shifting landscape that blurs the lines between stillness and volatility. He rolls through a seemingly infinite array of pure tones, metallic rustling and blunt rumbling to construct a deliciously unstable, topographically varied landscape, allowing his cohort to impart highly effective stretches of silence between overdriven groans, sudden plinks and grainy smears. The two musicians are seriously locked in, responding but not following, and sometimes provoking, as when Julian injects the sound of a ringing telephone halfway through "NR1", which flattens out before fading into silence, reframing the corrugated grind of the violinist with sudden spaciousness.

Free improvisation often focuses on the interplay between musicians, and while there's no doubt that Davies and Julian have discovered a truly fruitful rapport, this music never stalls or stutters. They push each other in such a way that there's never a lack of vibrant ideas. They've created a sonic environment I'd love to spend days wandering within. Here's hoping we'll have more opportunities to get lost within their twined sounds.

Peter Margasak

Eartheater
Powders
Chemical X DL

Powders is Eartheater's first album since 2020's *Phoenix: Flames Are Dew Upon My Skin* and her second release – following 2019's *Trinity* mixtape – through her own label Chemical X. Throughout the new album aspects of Alexandra Drewchin's previous releases are crushed down into the mix – the acoustic guitar plucks that formed the body of *Phoenix* and the skittering drum patterns that played an integral role in *Trinity*.

Often, the lyrics of New York based Drewchin take a scalpel to language, cutting in, allowing words to weep out and form trails of new phrases, traces of which remain humorously visible. "Mona Lisa Moan" is a key example, Drewchin's whispered, serpent tongued vocals are mixed more upfront than on previous releases, vocal chords stretched into high frequency cries on the verge of snapping. Her wordplay directly references this slipping feeling we are implored to give in to. The droning strings on opening track "Sugarcane Switch" preface juddering spectral synth and a knocking kick, wrapped in fragile earworm textures that stretch and creak.

Frequent collaborators Sega Bodega, Kiri and Tony Seltzer provide production on some of the beat orientated tracks among a host of other names such as Yves Rothman (who has also worked with Yves Tumor and Amaarae on recent releases), Lecx Stacy and Isaiah Barr, Elliot Kozel, Luis Aponte, Casey MQ and Sammy. Sega Bodega and Drewchin's production for "Pure Smile Snake Venom" results in the album's most club-ready offering, while its lyric plays on the duality of bared teeth functioning both as welcome and warning.

The acoustic arrangements of guitar and piano act as a liquid counterpoint to programmed drum sequences. Drums are entirely absent from "Salt Of The Earth (H2ome)" and "Chop Suey". On the latter, Drewchin reworks System Of A Down's 2001 nu metal anthem into an intimate, ruminative piece that hangs, soaking, in drunken despair.

Misha Farrant

Carlos Ferreira
Isolationism
AKP DL/MC

Listening to earlier pieces by Brazilian musician Carlos Ferreira – specifically 2018's *Hibrido*, a set of emotionally charged orchestrations scattered with snippets of field recordings – the bones of his more recent work can be heard. What surprises on *Isolationism* is the evocative pastorality that dominates in the wake of doom-laden opener "An Extension Of Breath" – expanding the discrete interludes punctuating previous releases into vivid and coherent swathes of humid greens and blues.

A constant natural pulse runs low in the mix. "Artificial Lungs" revolves around an intoxicating climatic churn, evoking the sound of wind moving through woodland, while "Living A Metaphor" threads the chatter of birdsong through almost jazzy instrumentation. That's not to say atonal abstraction is completely absent. "Quietude I" and "Quietude II" are islands of abrasive

The debut album from Glasgow producer KAVARI places the listener in a fight for survival

By Misha Farrant

Hail the new flesh: KAVARI

KAVARI
Against The Wood, Opposed To Flesh
Bandcamp DL

The tracks that bookend the debut album by Glasgow based artist, producer and DJ Cameron Sofia Winters aka KAVARI allude to cult activities. On "Initiation Tape (Intro)" a soft voice invites the listener or *"prospect"* to take part in an initiation process but also warns about making *"others aware"* of the cult's presence. "Let It Mean Something At Least" concludes the album with a whispered *"You are finally a true member of our family"*. Ominous and obscure, encountering *Against The Wood, Opposed To Flesh* is like stumbling across a fragment of online creepypasta.

Here KAVARI largely moves away from the hard dance inflected arrangements she carved out on previous releases like 2022's *Suture* EP or the club collection *Lost Cuts*. These have made her an intriguing figure in the UK's club scene, where she's known for heavy and chaotic DJ sets that draw inspiration from Crystal Castles, Réelle, Arca, Skrillex and Aphex Twin. Constructing harsh auditory scenes like excerpts from survival horror soundtracks, this new project leans into noise and dark ambient territory. Winters has made reference to being a horror fan and discussed the influence it has had on her artistically – particularly the found footage subgenre thrust into the mainstream by 1999's *The Blair Witch Project*. She regularly draws from an assortment of other horror media in her work, and *Against The Wood* incorporates samples from the films *Ginger Snaps* and *V/H/S*, the horror video games *Outlast*, *Left 4 Dead* and *Paratopic*, and the Slenderman-fixated YouTube serial *Marble Hornets*.

Being dropped into one of Winters's compositions is to fluctuate between contrasting episodes of terror. Second track "Ritual" gives the impression of running from a lumbering behemoth through a thick wooded area, its breath on your neck, globules of saliva dripping from the creature's mouth. On "Defiled (Bite The Hand)", you find yourself fumbling around a decrepit home attempting to escape. Long after the winter night has set in, there is no light, and using one would risk making your presence known. Muffled dialogue soaked in radio static always seem to emanate from the next room, no matter where in the house you are.

Throughout the album, an assortment of distortions assault the eardrums. Clipped fire crackles, wind is blown out via FX chains. A gravelly voice is introduced once again by radio static bleeding into a backdrop of burning on "204863 ⌖". The voice recounts a spate of domestic homicides by fathers. Winters's production techniques make use of many of Ableton's stock plug-ins – Saturator, the Multiband Dynamics preset OTT and Grain Delay are some of her favourites, using them, among others, to fold the listener into intricately sculpted environments of noise.

There are moments of lighter ambience, such as the revolving "Tower Of Silence", the shimmering "Laid To Rest" and "Void Salts (Interlude)". The gloom of "Laid To Rest" – along with the sprawling lamentous echoes of "† Hollow Hills †" and the heaving bass of "Boleskine" – echoes the dark world building of US producer Lorn. Moments of light and possible escape, however, are speckled with an underlayer of mould spores; Winters continuously finds ways of corrupting the sonics, imploding the ambience with dirt.

This process lulls the listener into a false sense of security, before falling into another scene that induces a new state of fear. On "Watch It Burn With Me" and final track "Let It Mean Something At Least", the synth melodies take a much more prominent role, driving the pieces forward with urgency. The album closer sees synths pulse and flash in arpeggiated sequences, building in energy before sharply cutting out. Winters revels in the role of sonic cult leader, luring her flock deeper into ever more treacherous spaces. ●

drone, the comparative lack of natural sounds in these spaces standing out like a spot on the land made uninhabitable by something toxic washing through the soil.

However, the majority of *Isolationism* actually registers like tropical iterations of the jazz-inflected pastoralities recently emanating from Edinburgh's Blackford Hill label. This is most notable on the leafy wooze of "Naturaleza Muerta", whose heat bent notes and slowly malfunctioning tape loops conjure the fading light of dusk across verdant terrain. Natural sounds are kept in parallel but at a distance from the slowly unfurling and loosely languid instrumentals, so that neither is smudged or altered by the other, operating in simultaneous though separate unison. While evoking something of nature – perhaps specifically the landscape of the artist's home in Porto Alle, Brazil – this slight space between the tape's field recordings and lush electronics means that the album might deliver pastorality, but it's imbued with an intriguing out of placeness that's not quite eerie, but not far off.
Spenser Tomson

Flux Gourmet: Original Motion Picture Soundtrack
Various
Ba Da Bing DL/LP

In 2022, singular UK film maker Peter Strickland followed up his 2018 ghost story *In Fabric* with *Flux Gourmet*, an art satire set at a food-themed musical institute. As a "sonic catering" performance collective undertake a residency – extracting sounds from blenders, chopped vegetables and their own gastrointestinal systems – the players descend into a typically Stricklandian mania.

The soundtrack itself plays with truth and fiction, diegetic and non-diegetic sound. Ten tracks come from Strickland's own Sonic Catering Band, a real group he founded in 1996 which provided inspiration for the combo in the film. These contributions mainly track creeping horror, with sounds reminiscent of growling guts ("Dietary Crash"), electronic carving knives ("HLA-DQ8") and spitting fat

Spit Turner

("Vegetable Trash"). Also included is "Hindu Monastery Breakfast" by Nurse With Wound, a cut from Sonic Catering Band's 2001 compilation *Artificial Additives*. Interestingly, it's the track that most resembles one of the film's Foley food experiments, all of its sonic elements seemingly deriving from splashing water, rolling bowls and the rhythmic sluicing of knives.

The range of musicians involved in the soundtrack suggests a revolving door of artists, much like in the institute in the film. It's therefore odd to find that a number of them have turned out similar drone pieces – including sole contributions from sound designer Tim Harrison, producer Marta Salogni and Cavern Of Anti-Matter. These samey pieces can be cut off like extraneous fat. Unexpectedly for a film about Foley, some of the soundtrack's highlights are the most melodic and song-like, courtesy of Jeremy Barnes and Heather Trost, whose sing-song "Earlier Gardens" teases out the film's uncanny eeriness and referential aesthetic. Barnes's trio of variations on "The Funeral Table" is at once farcical and earnest, an apt distillation of Strickland's appeal.

Claire Biddles

Peter Gabriel
i/o
Real World/EMI/Republic 2xCD/2xCD+Blu-ray/DL/2xLP

Peter Gabriel's tenth studio album is the art rock lifer's first collection of new material since 2002's *Up*. He's been building up to the big reveal since January 2023, when he started leaking tracks from it on each month's full moon. The complete album is presented in two differently mixed versions – the *Bright-Side Mix* by Mark 'Spike' Stent and the *Dark-Side Mix* by Tchad Blake.

Gabriel's warm, roughly textured voice has barely aged, sounding as tender and powerful here as on "Here Comes The Flood" from his 1977 solo debut. The lyrics ruminate on themes of mortality, justice, grief, healing, technology and communication, while the music doesn't push the envelope so much as offer a sample of Gabriel's various modes, its novel presentation betraying his roots in the conceptually minded world of 1970s prog. The chunky weirdo grooves of "Panopticom" (inspired by Gabriel's efforts to create "an infinitely expandable accessible data globe") and "The Court" hark back to the haunting art rock of 1978's Robert Fripp-produced *Peter Gabriel* (also known as *Scratch due* to its distinctive Hipgnosis cover photography).

There are also nods to the funked up bombast of 1986's *So* ("Road To Joy" and "Olive Tree") alongside meditative ballads ("Love Can Heal") and gospel-enriched pop ("This Is Home", "Live And Let Live"). "Four Kinds Of Horses" meanwhile distills the ambient drama of *Up* into a sultry epic. The production is rich in texture and transient detail, and the playing, in particular from regular associates guitarist David Rhodes, bassist Tony Levin and drummer Manu Katché, is supportive and modestly accomplished. Longtime associate Brian Eno contributes sounds and co-chairs production on several tracks; one senses his influence in the strange sonic densities and playful dynamic shifts that startle and surprise throughout.

Across repeated listens I find myself impressed by the genuine optimism of *i/o*. Though often portrayed as one of rock's most ambitious thinkers – having provided an ethical outlet for non-Western music via the Real World label, co-founded the WOMAD organisation, pioneered interactive multimedia technology and advocated consistently for human rights across the globe – Gabriel's not trying to be clever here, he's being sincere. And because I favour savoury over sweet, I can strongly recommend the *Dark-Side Mix* which has more room to breathe, a fatter bottom end and weirder edges all round.

Leah Kardos

Robert Hood & Femi Kuti
Variations
M-Plant CD/DL/LP

Universal Harmonies & Frequencies
Tune In
Yeyeh DL/LP

Two new records that explore what happens when a DJ/producer and a horn player are put together. First off, *Variations* documents DJ Hood and Femi Kuti's improvised tribute to James Brown as part of Sourdeoreille's *Variations* confections for French TV.

The duo's sensitivity to each other's sonic space is key here. Kuti's playing is exquisite, as much lit up by jazz as seemingly informed by Indian shehnai playing. Though Hood's backing couldn't be called innovative, it's a propulsive lattice of beats, bass, loops, samples and synths that's happy to provide both counterpoint and dreamy soundbed to Kuti's elaborations. Crucially, there's no sense of mere ease and virtuosity here – both have clearly thought about James Brown a lot – Hood is smart enough to hold on to basslines and beats, making them become hypnotically repetitious. Similarly Kuti seems to meld both a Fred Wesley sense of dead-on funkiness in the moments where he takes on Brown's vocal heat, interjections and commands. Better than you might expect.

Universal Harmonies & Frequencies are Chicagoan DJ/producer Jamal Moss aka Hieroglyphic Being and saxophonist/composer/producer Jerzy Mączyński, bought together by Yeyeh label founder Pieter Jansen (who similarly united Mączyński with fellow Polish experimentalist Wacław Zimpel on the collaborative *Sariani* in 2021). The 26 long improvised tracks that came out of a five day improv session in Amsterdam in 2022 have here been knocked into shape by Jansen and Sauvage Nolting, Mączyński contributing saxophones and electronics, Moss laying down synthesizer parts and vocals.

Tune In is an entirely different beast to *Variations* – post-production edits have smoothed these 12 tracks into something that tightrope walks between improvisation and remix, ancient and futurist, and the attention to detail in the way every refracted shimmer of sax ripples over the dubby, mesmeric low end arcadia summoned by Moss is sublime. The highlight "Multidimensional Transformation" plunges Jam & Lewis/Paisley Park beats against a fuzzy, grainy modular synth pulse, but each of the 12 tracks here offers derailed delights and a truly uniquely odd meld of the familiar and uncanny.

Neil Kulkarni

Idea Fire Company
Bathroom Electronics
Horn Of Plenty DL/LP

The idea of the bathroom as resonant space crops up here and there in the history of recorded sound. Martin Hannett perched a speaker on a toilet to augment the sound of Stephen Morris's drums during the recording of Joy Divison's *Unknown Pleasures* while Steve Albini filled a bathroom with Marshall amplifiers to achieve the echoey soundworld of Pixies' *Surfer Rosa*.

Hard tiles refract sound, which makes a bathroom more or less the opposite to a conventional recording studio, designed to create a flat and deadened environment. But the unconventional sonics of a bathroom environment makes it an ideal space for Idea Fire Company, a Massachusetts unit some three decades into their journey through the fringes of the international avant garde.

Some years ago, Idea Fire Company – the husband and wife duo of Scott Foust and Karla Borecky – put their name to the *Anti-Naturals Manifesto*, a situationist-inspired text that celebrated the embrace of artificiality as a challenge to what they perceived as tired, consumerist notions of authenticity and the natural. You can hear *Bathroom Electronics* as a statement very much in that spirit. Across four tracks, Foust and Borecky – assisted in places by fellow travellers Timothy Shortell and *The Wire* contributor Matt Krefting – set out to explore the distinct reverb of this most domestic of spaces, cramming themselves and a variety of synths and keyboards somewhere in between bath, sink and toilet and seeing what emerges.

Bathroom Electronics makes this quintessentially domestic and private space seem otherworldly. The spasmodic pops and clicks of the opening "Boulevard Of Dreams" could be a submarine radar picking up foreign objects. "High Test" and "Addicts" feel like a mutant take on ritual music, extended vocal workouts buried under a clamour of throbbing and whining synths. The sidelong "The End Of The Line" offers a mix of drone and melody that, improbably, brings to mind bagpipes.

Paradoxically, for a space associated with hygiene and cleanliness, the bathroom has a tendency to blend sounds together into a thick sonic grot. You don't come out of *Bathroom Electronics* feeling clean – quite the opposite – but I suspect that for Idea Fire Company, that's mission accomplished.

Louis Pattison

Kid Acne
Hauntology Codes
Lex CD/DL/LP

There's more than a few moments on Yorkshire based MC Kid Acne's sixth solo album when he takes pains to make sure you don't take him too seriously. Like "Dues Paid (Now I'm Overdrawn)", a characteristic tale of an underappreciated old god self-medicating

with mescaline and valerian, prefaced by the ludicrous tones of sometime UK light entertainment plonker Noel Edmonds asking *"Has everybody been given the mantra we're going to use today?"*. Or the track which follows, where apparently sober claims of righteous insight are lent bleak humour by a titular hook quoting the cod-mystic coinage of British comedian Vic Reeves, with glorious pomp, "Eranu/Uvavu".

To a point this is Acne's regular modus operandi. The contrast with Nottingham titan Cappo, who guests here on "Healthy Normalz", is stark. Both own the mic through sheer vocal presence, but where Cappo stays icy calm there's a demented edge to Acne boasting he's *"stood here with a placcy bag full of second hand sticklebricks"*. And as ever there's endless fun to be had soaking up absurd imagery like his vision of 1980s BBC children's TV puppets Cosmo and Dibs programming "Impeach The President".

But age has brought a new urgency to Acne's serious asides, the gravity of a man battling demons with an almost desperate faith in the redemptive power of weaponised drums. *"Went through some shit when I wrote this"*, he tells us on "Eat Right", *"Not that anybody noticed"*. For the most part he bounces back, here with a wickedly funny character sketch, *"One sip of brown medicine/ Now he's questioning everything/Except Freestyle Fellowship"*.

On "Quicksand" there's a counterpoint all the more powerful for being an exception, its earnest invitation to *"sink into the beat like quicksand"* providing the dark heart of a tight and effective set.

Richard Stacey

Klein
Touched By An Angel
Parkwuud DL/MC

Rising spectral synth pads introduce "black famous". Titled after a US Christian TV series that ran from 1994–2003, it's the first of 14 songs on Klein's new album. Christianity is a recurring motif throughout much of Klein's work, having grown up in a religious household. In the distance of the mix, the South Londoner's filtered, warbling harmonisations allude to her love of R&B. These harmonisations are accompanied by semi-spoken utterances, taut and muffled, on the verge of tears, washed over by the singing and synths. The incorporation of these half rapped vocals calls to mind some of the spoken samples Klein played with on 2022's *Star In The Hood*.

The vocals across the album have a fragile, quivering nature, at points repitched into squirrelling pings. On "street cred", they are stretched and positioned between abstracted piano thrum and the sound of trickling water, echoing the production of another 2022 release, *Cave In The Wind*. Stretching is a recurring theme both in production technique and track duration. Six of the pieces run to seven minutes or more, allowing Klein to patiently map undulating frameworks incorporating quiet moments of contemplation that offset moments of cacophonous claustrophobia. This creates space both for bleary-eyed rumination and moments of bliss.

The longest track here is "200 bill" which features Matana Roberts on saxophone and, credited simply with horns, Khush (with whom Klein previously worked on the 2018 musical *Care*) across a sprawling ten minutes and 47 seconds. Roberts's staccato chirps intertwine with Khush's horns while Klein's electroacoustic atmospheres swirl and obscure the more fluid lines that emerge later on. "DJ drop" builds slowly with signature rattling loops of ambiguous foley, scuffling, chimes and layers of harmonised vocals crescendoing against bubbling distortion and scribbles of formant shifting. Noisy tapestries blur together, sounds melt away from their original source ("200 bill", for instance, incorporates the sounds of a hairbrush).

On the penultimate "no weapon shall form against me", repeated squeals collide with comical thudding. A harsher saturated whirr underpins "say black power and mean it", while in "bunk" guitar loops combine with vocal pops and whispered, floating vocals, summoning a sensation of repeatedly coiling and uncoiling.

Misha Farrant

Anysia Kym & Jadasea
Pressure Sensitive
Bandcamp DL

New York electronic producer and percussionist Anysia Kym and UK MC Jadasea's *Pressure Sensitive* offers a careful mixture of surging percussive rhythms and mesmerizing rhymes that have the listener alternating between emotive introspection and physical movement. Following each artist's adventurous past projects – Anysia Kym's 2022 *Soliloquy* and Jadasea's collaboration with UK producer Laron *The Corner Vol 1 – Pressure Sensitive* marks a joint effort that feels like a summer dream rave.

The opening track, aptly titled "Nothing Comes To A Sleeper But A Dream", sets the tone for its hazy rave-like atmosphere as it opens with heavenly synths and bass-heavy and bouncing drums. Several varying sonic flavours embrace the listener as they go from high energy techno-rave jams like "On Official" to the spooky yet alluring ambience of "Hard2sey", whose surging junglist patterns dance effortlessly with Jadasea's cyclical internal rhymes.

On tracks like "Darling" and "problem stays" Jadasea demonstrates his poetic and emotive might over Kym's eclectic production with sobering rhymes like *"This life a hurricane/Flooded and then the thunder came/It's lonelier than other days/Sun or rain/ Runaway"* and *"I know it's getting bad/Holding onto actual grief/Said I'd rip a page/Never said I'd turn a leaf"*. From its invigorating synth work, rapid bpms, nostalgic R&B samples, soul-probing lyrics and snippets of Franco Rosso's iconic dub-filled 1980 film of Black Britain *Babylon*, Anysia and Jadasea erect a bridge between their distant cities – a bridge constructed by Black diasporic experimentation in an ever growing and resilient underground.

Kehinde Alonge

Joëlle Léandre & Rodolphe Loubatière
Estampe
Confront CD/DL

Maggie Nicols/Matilda Rolfsson/Mark Wastell
Semiotic Drift
Confront CD/DL

Max Eastley/Terry Day/John Butcher
Angles Of Enquiry
Confront CD/DL

Ed Jones/Dominic Lash/Mark Wastell
Meditating With The Father, Son, And Holy Ghost
Confront CD/DL

Since emerging on London's improvised music scene more than three decades ago, self-taught percussionist Mark Wastell has channelled his catholic sensibilities into crucial community service. He launched his Confront label in 1996, surveying a massive swath of liminal approaches, routinely blurring the lines between jazz, classical and experimental practices, celebrating common threads between disparate traditions.

These recent recordings capture those broad sensibilities, whether he's playing or not. Recorded in Geneva, *Estampe* is a telepathic session between the brilliant French bassist Joëlle Léandre and percussionist Rodolphe Loubatière, who limits himself to snare drum, working primarily with friction rather than beats. Together they create an intense, almost ritualist dialogue marked by long grainy tones and slashing lines, with the former occasionally offering vocal incantations that alternately heighten or disrupt the hypnotic vibe.

Wastell has worked often with vocalist Maggie Nicols, and on *Semiotic Drift* the pair are joined by the young Norwegian percussionist Matilda Rolfsson, who also works with the singer and Swedish pianist Lisa Ullén in Trio Generations. Recorded in Oslo in early 2023, the 30 minute improvisation wends seamlessly through several disparate atmospheres, both percussionists deploying reduced tools to conjure harrowing textures and elastic motion, giving Nicols the kind of wide open latitude she thrives upon, sharing narrative fragments, unleashing wordless vocal fried groans and cries, or intoning swooping melodic shapes, literally invoking the spirit of Albert Ayler and Mary Maria Parks.

Angles Of Enquiry is a ruminative yet

Klein

visceral session from September of 2022 with saxophonist John Butcher improvising against the slightly more conventional kit drumming of Terry Day – at least compared with the other percussionists discussed here – and the abstract electronic monochord gestures and bird calls of Max Eastley. The interplay between those two key figures of 1970s British improvisation collides non-idiomatic spontaneity with squiggles, moans and chirps that occasionally evoke some kind of animal sanctuary, even when Butcher's muscular tenor taps into free jazz language.

Finally, there's the fat-free 18 minute CD single *Meditating With The Father, Son, And Holy Ghost*, where the playing of veteran saxophonist Ed Jones sighs, sobs, and swings alongside the warm, woody-toned lines of bassist Dominic Lash and Wastell's own cymbal-heavy machinations, a profoundly delicate collective meditation that captures the sort of community ethos behind Confront.

These recordings serve as documentation of something much larger than any musician or scene, and Wastell continues to invaluably serve a larger world of sonic explorers.

Peter Margasak

George Lewis/ICE
Afterword
New Focus CD/DL

Afterword, written in 2015, is George Lewis's first engagement, as composer and librettist, with operatic form and the trundling weight of history that comes with it. The success of this two-act work arises in part from tensions that are evident from its outset, marked by gong splashes and string flurries, indicative not of a fresh start on a blank page, but of entry into an already existing state with an established narrative. Such tensions, structural and thematic, are integral to opera, yet they also characterise the music Lewis has been making for many years as an improvising trombonist, notably adept in his handling of stress and release, intensity and balance.

Since 1971, Lewis has been a member of Chicago's Association for the Advancement of Creative Musicians, a community that has fostered reflective debate as well as dynamically constructive practices. The AACM, and a range of aesthetic and social issues it has sought to address, or had to confront, actually provides the focal point for Lewis's opera. Recordings of formative meetings during the 1960s, and more recent interviews with participants, have been fed into the libretto. The collective serves as a microcosm, illustrating widespread challenges and historical developments relating to race, gender, sexuality and economics, as well as the making of art.

On stage, the singers are required to enact a language of physical gestures that develops in counterpoint to their vocal performance. Heard on this recording, soprano Joelle Lamare, contralto Gwendolyn Brown and tenor Julian Terrell Otis still manage to project vividly their dramatic presence and interaction, while their voices are accompanied, glossed and accentuated by seven instrumentalists from The International Contemporary Ensemble.

An ostensible departure for Lewis, *Afterword* is actually a refined distillation and purposeful extension of his many earlier accomplishments.

Julian Cowley

DJ Manny
Hypnotized
Planet Mu DL/LP
Control
Planet Mu DL

Back once again on Planet Mu, Chicago footwork legend DJ Manny follows 2021's phenomenal *Signals In My Head* and a clutch of tunes released independently and via labels such as Issa Party and Moveltraxx. The title track is one to get down to – utilising the space of half-time footwork, it's a mid-2000s style R&B track at its core. "Spaceship" is more reserved, with an eerie feel, its music box melodies taking centre stage before the drill beat adds a rougher edge.

"Bang This Joint" harnesses the energy of old school grime without ever venturing all the way into the genre – it offers a perfect example of the diasporic pollination filtering through dance music at the moment. "Let It Break" has a sultry R&B flex with fragments of jungle let loose halfway through. Closer "Time Travel" is a 1980s heartbreak ballad done DJ Manny style, with the finest bassline/melody combo of the release.

Close behind comes *Hypnotized*, a full-length album also released via Planet Mu. Opener "Hard Drive" sets the tone and pace, a certified late night footwork slow jam. Nu-school R&B vocals pair with a refined, restrained approach to production. "WTF Goin On" is a soundtrack to seasonal tears with quick drums, jazzy melodics and a recurring vocal reminder that few among us know *"what the fuck is going on"*.

From deep within the vaults, the DJ Rashad collaboration "Ooh Baby" is electro battle footwork at its rawest. The more experimental "I Can Luv U" is a 160 bp ballad which uses simplicity to evoke a whole range of emotions. Both *Control* and *Hypnotized* appear effortless while pushing forward footwork as a genre.

Yewande Adeniran

Trevor Mathison
From Signal To Decay: Vol 5
purge.xxx DL

Trevor Mathison's *From Signal To Decay: Vol 5* is released in a limited edition by experimental label purge.xxx to accompany the UK multidisciplinary artist's solo exhibition in the Brussels based gallery Argos.

It's a perfect example of Mathison's expert stitching together of sounds, collaging various sections of his extensive repertoire: dub, drone and musique concrète, all from a series of performances entitled Sonic Investigations which were spread out and recorded across different areas of the basement at London Goldsmiths CCA in 2022. Like previous entries in the series, *Vol 5* leans on Mathison's longterm involvement in the paradigm shifting Black Audio Film Collective, a group including artists, film makers and writers whose work paved the way for contemporary Afropessimists and decolonial thinkers, and which dissolved in 1998.

Mathison teases out some sublimely eerie moments from recordings of birdsong, gentle synths and airy melodies. Glitchy snow hits the ground on the A side with an anticipatory – if prickly – drone that clips and sweeps its way from side to side. For a moment, clean, luscious strings make an appearance, followed by some sharp whispers of *"In the beginning"* while faint operatic singing is heard in the distance. The second side is interjected by police sirens whose distorted wail seems to infect the soundscape – the choppy strings that follow find the same panicked pitch. Then it all ends, a bit too soon.

Xenia Benivolski

MHYSA
Release Control
Bandcamp DL

Saying that MHYSA makes experimental R&B does American intermedia artist E Jane's work a disservice. It reduces the complex idiomatic expressions found in their productions to an ambiguous modifier and reductive noun. MHYSA's second album *NEVAEH*, released in 2020, created the illusion of fractured interiority by bringing together a set of demolished productions built on tremulous vocals, vaporous noise and stuttering snares. Latest album *Release Control* commences with an echoing, knocking set of drum beats as Jane duets with their own altered voice, seemingly keeping in time with a shadow twin.

The percussion drops in and out as they engage in light spoken word – taken together, the song is fractal yet hummable. There's something more slippery about this music – the harmonies of a typical R&B song gain dissonance due to discordant instrumentation and metallic production. For example, the industrial bassline and hollowed out raps of "YONCÉ" make up a melodic landscape filled with jutting 808s and haunted alarms, creating the effect of being inside and outside at the same time.

Release Control recalls the corroded pop of Tweaks or the homemade house productions of Bryant Canelo – there's a wily nature to the way all these artists rigorously deconstruct genre. Jane's tactics on this album vary throughout, and they are willing to change tack for temporary effect. The continuously altered vocal sample of "Good Vibe" builds an uneven surface for their raps to amble on, the sweltering guitar and drizzling synths of "Chelsea Gurls" are paired with robotic harmonies, and embryonic vocals and ambient electronics collide on "Dessert".

While these changes are challenging, they also provide the album with a distinct flow, centring it to improvisatory looseness. What might have seemed like barriers to understanding at the beginning of the album are understood to be building blocks by its end. The structure is somewhat inscrutable, yet not one brick is misplaced.

Hubert Adjei-Kontoh

Steve Noble
HEMP
Ping Pong 4xCD

As one of improvised music's greatest drummers, London's Steve Noble elevates

London based drummer Valentina Magaletti charges five distinct releases with percussive ingenuity

By Abi Bliss

Better Corners
Continuous Miracles Vol 2
State51 Conspiracy DL/LP
CZN
SSS
Trilogy Tapes DL/MC
Holy Tongue
Deliverance And Spiritual Warfare
Amidah CD/DL/LP
Moin
Clocked Off
AD 93 DL/EP
V/Z
Suono Assente
AD 93 DL/LP

Got skins: Valentina Magaletti

"I never slag off any opportunity, if I like the people," Valentina Magaletti told Ilia Rogatchevski in *The Wire* 459. "You always learn something, or you learn what you don't want to do. I'm always being told that I'm a softie and should say no more." It's a mark of Magaletti's talent and craft that the ever-active drummer and percussionist sounds recognisable on each of the numerous musical projects she says yes to – even her earliest recorded work on Fugazi-inspired rockers Econoline's 2002 album *Music Is Stupid* bears her hallmarks – yet the Valentina Magaletti that shows up for each one is always exactly what the music needs.

If Magaletti's approach to her work suggests a parallel with her kit, each music narrowing the focus to certain instruments, timbres and rhythmic influences, but maintaining a feeling of extending beyond and outwards to the whole world, that's aided by the interwoven network of musicians she has built since moving from the southern Italian city of Bari to London in the early 2000s. After drumming for artists including Gruff Rhys and Bat For Lashes, her own artistry came to prominence with Tomaga, her duo with Tom Relleen, who she met when both were playing with psych/krautrock outfit The Oscillation.

Relleen's tragically early death in 2020 put an end to a pairing that still had a lot more to say, but among Magaletti's other avenues were Vanishing Twin, the hauntological pop group founded by Cathy Lucas, where rhythmic versatility ensured that their music went beyond photocopying Broadcast's legacy. The Z half of Magaletti's duo V/Z is Zongamin, an alias of Vanishing Twin's Susumu Mukai; their debut album *Suono Assente* takes its title from the Italian for absent sound. The phrase jumps out from the speech of an unidentified man on the titular opening track, which rattles along like a train of Hitchcockian intrigue, Magaletti's taut rhythms moving between snare, tambourine, cowbell and hi-hats that snap shut like a clawed trap.

A similar sense of uneasy mystery pervades the album's other instrumental tracks. "Nail Jar" dangles cymbals over thick, Mellotron-like layers of blurred sound, while the buzzing organ, insistent 4/4 snare and miaowing synths of "Caffe Giallo" are punctuated by a man's stern instruction to *"Drink from your cup"*. Elsewhere, Lucas is among the album's guest vocalists, lending a moonlit lilt to the growling, dubby "Haberdash". Venus Ex Machina provides pitch-split cyborg bookends to the surfy guitar and delay feedback loops of "Plants No Virtues", and on "Bites", Coby Sey's gravel whisper tells a tale of vampiric eroticism before an unidentifiable instrument unleashes a squealing, twisted-tape solo.

Susumu Mukai also joins Magaletti and Al Wootton on Holy Tongue's debut album *Deliverance And Spiritual Warfare*, a broadening of both the line-up and musical horizons after the leaner post-punk dub workouts of the pre-existing duo's first three EPs. "Saeta" opens the album with martial beats and solemn Andalusian style trumpet fanfares before demanding industrial techno segues into a softly subaquatic realm of shakers, bells and gentle synth textures.

While Holy Tongue's essential template taps into the echoes of the post-punk dub innovators still reverberating around London, dub's ability to stretch the space between every beat and bass note opens up room for a wealth of other ideas. Autoharps unfurl like butterfly wings over laser strike synths on "Kaneh Bosem", complementing a backbeat that slams down with aggressive finality. "Susuro" is understated but insidious, percussion and bass bobbing and bubbling away like a motorik machine hand-carved from bamboo. On "Joachim", edgily pacing bass and a patter of hand drums that creep up and down in pitch suddenly pause as Steve Beresford's prepared piano solo interjects like a change of mind.

Similar undercurrents of obfuscation by the subconscious pervade *Continuous Miracles Vol 2*, the second album from Better Corners. The trio comprise Magaletti, her UUUU co-member Matthew Simms, and New York based musician and sound engineer Sarah Register. The latter's time playing guitar for Kim Gordon resonates with her hushed monotone vocals – always on the edge of intelligibility, of revealing her secrets – and the *EVOL*-era murk that saturates the album. "Cremated Pets" in particular offers a light-dappled counterpart to Sonic Youth's "Shadow Of A Doubt" while the stream of consciousness vocals in the 16 minute "Career Test" are buffeted by eddies of tumbling toms before hungrily howling guitars rip through the morass.

By way of contrast, *Clocked Off*, the latest from Moin, Magaletti's trio with Joe Andrews and Tom Halstead of Raime, is as crisply decisive as decapitation by sharpened cymbal. "Pockets" establishes its four tracks' balance between aggressive release and equally powerful restraint, augmenting elastic but precise tom cascades and terse, three-note bass with a sample of a quarrelling couple: he raging, she quietly assertive. And on *SSS* by CZN, she locks into a groove with fellow drummer João Pais Filipe, the warm tones of their tireless polyrhythms frosted by Leon Marks's neon-smear synth chords. It's over in half an hour, but sounds as though they could power on forever. ●

Louise Mason

any situation. Released on his recently reactivated Ping Pong label, the acronymically titled *HEMP* pays homage to Han Bennink, Ed Blackwell, Milford Graves and Phil Seamen – "the four drummers I came across on the day I bought my first drum kit and who have remained a constant source of inspiration", as Noble states in the sleevenotes. The aim is not to imitate them but convey what they have inspired in him over the years. Noble translates elements of each drummer's language into his own voice, playing a specific drum and cymbal set-up to evoke the sound he associates with each of them, and choosing his duo partners accordingly. The results are thrilling.

On the Bennink disc, Noble presents his percussion set up as a "TenToonsTelling", a play on the Dutch for exhibition. Working through his collection, Noble drags a megaphone across the drumskin, creating a vortex of distorted vocalisations and whistling feedback. Short pieces for stereo panned wobble board, musical saw and opera gongs are interwoven with polyrhythmic workouts on a modified kit. The remaining tracks offer more sustained explorations of Bennink's inspiration, with Alex Ward's clarinet moving through raspy whorls, sighing glissandi and blues.

"Pick Up" and "Rolling With The G&A" bookend the Blackwell set, with Noble working up a multidirectional groove alongside DJ G&A's sampled guimbri and double reeds. Three tracks feature Gabriel Wonck on trumpet. Blackwell and Don Cherry's *Mu* is an obvious reference point, but Wonck has his own voice, alternately laconic and animated. The homage to Milford Graves is the most powerful of the four, beginning with the deep lowing and rippling airflow of Noble swinging a bullroarer before he moves on to a meditative gong passage reminiscent of Graves's classic *Grand Unification*. Alan Wilkinson's bass clarinet slowly emerges through the shimmering overtones, setting up a riveting duo exchange that moves through soaring arcs, insectoid chittering and ecstatic waves.

For the Seamen set, Noble plays a conventional trap kit, keeping time to tenor saxophonist James Allsopp's fluid post-bop moves. Yet Noble retains his leading role, defining the character of the music with his strong rhythmic phrasing and vivid sense of colour. Noble's hi-hat solo on "Double Down" is a gas, with its backhand flicks and open-shut swishes, while on "The Closer" his unaccompanied drums resound with melody and swing.

Stewart Smith

Aruán Ortiz
The Pastor's Paradox
Clean Feed CD/DL

Cuban born, Brooklyn based pianist and composer Aruán Ortiz was commissioned to write a single composition in 2020, and that work – created in the year of the mass protests following the murder of George Floyd – grew into a five-part suite partly inspired by Martin Luther King Jr's speech at the march on Washington. Ortiz has expanded that suite into a seven-part song cycle that attempts to explore the turbulence of King's times in a fusion of European avant garde, Cuban jazz and Afrofuturist abstraction.

Opening track "Autumn Of Freedom" begins with a wild flurry – Albert Ayler and Cecil Taylor recalled in the pointillist sonic action, the title track then instils a weird sense of almost meditative blues, somewhere akin to a Bartók string quartet played by Charlie Haden's Liberation Orchestra. "Turning The Other Cheek No More" forces the mix into a more militant abrasion, the cello proving key in ramping up the sense of impending chaos and doom.

"The Dream That Wasn't Meant To Be" proves to be a centrepiece – ten minutes of wonder that moves from whispering contemplativeness to clamorous fury. Spoken word from multidisciplinary artist Mtume Gant directs the resonances with carefully chosen meditations on King's later speech. "From Montgomery To Memphis" pianistically traces the flow of Civil Rights marchers constantly under threat of attack, violence, bloodshed, evoked in sharp squally lines from the horns and arrhythmic drums.

The brief "An Interval Of Hope" poignantly suggests that though hope is so often broken on reality's rocks, it's still the only game worth playing before "No Justice, No Peace, Legacy!" closes the album out on a wonderful mix of Don Cherry-ish universality and Watts Prophets-style doomy agitation. It's in the sensitivity to the issues at play, and its refusal to simply chart a move from idealism to cynicism that *The Pastor's Paradox* really excels. Neither hagiography nor hatchet job, it keeps all the contradictions and complexities of its subject intact. Enthralling.

Neil Kulkarni

Tony Oxley
The New World
Discus CD/DL

One of the true pioneers of free improvisation, British percussionist Tony Oxley has never allowed himself to be limited by the tools of his trade. In 2016, during a celebration of pianist Cecil Taylor in New York, illness made the physical exertion of his old approach difficult, so he turned to electronics.

It's a path he continued down in the year since, and on this new recording he's developed a method for creating sound with close-miked metallic objects. He recorded *The New World* in Viersen, Germany in 2022 with percussionist Stefan Hölker, clearly an adherent of Oxley's radical methods, who complements the elusive, sometimes liquid flurries of frictive sound and clatter with his own rustling noises.

I'm assuming it's Hölker who used a drum as a sound platform, whether rubbing brushes or sticks across the skin's surface. Ultimately, it's not only hard to tell but irrelevant to what the pair have in mind. Oxley casts a swirling, viscous sound that morphs, transmutes and seethes, gently, as metallic pings complement and dissolve into fractalised whooshes and gurgling smears. Sometimes the timbre suggests a kind of digital decay, as if the details of real-time sound production are deliberately flattened and compressed as with an MP3 file. Across six pieces Oxley and Hölker collide striated, machine-like ambience with delicate, complementary hand-driven patter, with each half of the equation interacting naturally, as if one was emerging from the other, without a dash of illusion-busting latency.

Their rapport and Oxley's fine-tuned commitment to such a specific palette is impressive, but over the course of 53 minutes a desire for greater dynamism emerges, either in terms of more intensity, a greater perception of pulse, or some additional colour.

There is still a lot going on here, but I think a more generous engineering job would've worked wonders.

Peter Margasak

Janneke van der Putten
JNNK
Aloardi/Idraola DL/LP

Janneke van der Putten is a Dutch experimental artist who explores space using extended and extreme vocal techniques, setting sounds into motion that work within architectural acoustics, upon differently reflective surfaces and across physical distances. There are no words and no musical instruments, aside from van der Putten's voice.

The point of fascination is not the weirdness of what the artist is doing with their voice, but the accumulation of acoustic effects that are summoned within a resonant space. In "Attacked And Over-Tuned" van der Putten moves around the proximity of binaural microphones, performing a glottal ululation that edges on her natural register break, causing a pitch oscillation that blurs into a multiphonic auditory illusion. The longer you listen, the more impossible if feels. It also sounds a bit funny, like the bleating of a glitching goat.

"In Cycles" extends across a single repeated note for 14 minutes. Listen closely and you can hear the spectral harmonics shimmering overhead, coalescing into something sharp, or atomising into mist. After a while comes the grind of pulse phonation and creak, ushering a thick droning seam of almost industrial sound. On "Voice And Space I" we hear two voices (the other provided by Anaïs Barbier) shriek across a distance. Starting out as high-pitched squeals, they gradually descend into guttural screams. Behind the voices, cavernous reflections seem to move heavy like water.

The finale is the brief "Acoustic Reflections Of One Voice In A Church" where van der Putten becomes a one-woman cluster chord, her two-tone alternation clouded by shadows of spectral multiplicity. The rigorous minimalism of *JNNK* won't be for everybody, but those interested in hearing what a single live voice can achieve in collaboration with acoustic space may find this engrossing.

Leah Kardos

Lucy Railton
Corner Dancer
Modern Love DL/LP

This is one of the heaviest and most brutal records of 2023, its architecture suggestive of long dank corridors with passages of

flickering neon light. Classically trained cellist and composer Lucy Railton, known for interpreting Messiaen and Bach, and collaborating with artists such as Kali Malone or Laurel Halo, patiently mounts tension, playing with the anxious energy emerging from the silence.

Railton's droning cello sounds almost tangible, like a buzzsaw. The combination of sub-bass rumble and crisp high ends inspires paranoia, as though someone or something were lurking behind your back. In a recent interview with *Tone Glow*, Railton discussed computer games giving her similar heart in throat moments as inspiration: "The sound world of those games was really impressive. It was all about the sound, the space, and what we were hearing around the corner." Which perhaps explains the album's title.

Corner Dancer is more minimalist than 2018's solo debut *Paradise 94*, but Railton achieves maximal results. Her cello is accompanied by electroacoustic crackling – which Railton fell in love with after her 2016 collaboration with synth pioneer Peter Zinovieff, *RFG Inventions For Cello And Computer*. She works with spare instrumentation and forensic attention to sonic detail.

The title track is the most expansive piece and utilises roaring Buchla alongside Railton's processed voice. "Something In The Heavens" is filled with gothic drama, while closing "Blush Study" switches to hypnagogic pop and could easily land on a Hype Williams album. Exhaustion dawns as the album draws to its conclusion – then, suddenly, a vibrating cello materialises from the stillness as an encore.

Miloš Hroch

Maja SK Ratkje & Nordic Affect
RÖKKUR
Øra Fonogram DL/LP

Erlend Apneseth Trio & Maja SK Ratkje
Collage
Hubro CD/DL/LP

Norwegian vocalist and composer Maja SK Ratkje's history with the Nordic noise fringe can be both a misleading and instructive background detail. Placing her in that context could give you a wholly inaccurate idea of where she's going at any given point in her 25 plus year career. But, in hindsight, it usually makes sense of where she's been.

Collage, with Erlend Apneseth Trio, is one of two new releases featuring Ratkje in collaboration with two distinct, mostly string-driven and generally un-noisy ensembles. Featuring Apneseth on Hardanger fiddle, Stephan Meidell on guitar, samples and synths and Øyvind Hegg-Lunde on assorted percussion, it's a studio recording traced over and drawn out from a prior live improvisation, sounding appropriately like a score taking and falling out of shape in real time.

It's not overly academic to suggest a dialectic at play – one of learning, unlearning and relearning; of becoming and unbecoming form, all of which might well be the very code of Ratkje's modus operandi. But it overlooks the album's impressionistic, even hallucinogenic appeal. It's built up from undulating waveform-like movements, not all of them led by vocals. But, like all elements, the voice is ever present even when it's not active. At one point, in "Ein Annan Himmel", Epneseth's Hardanger pierces through a moment of sonic fury with an uncannily brassy tone. Multiple repeated listens later, I still can't compute that, in that precise second, it's not a saxophone. That may sound like an irrelevant observation but it demonstrates a protean, low-lit dream logic that suffuses the rest of the release. Everything sounds like it's in the process of becoming something else.

RÖKKUR, recorded with Icelandic string quartet Nordic Affect (violinist Halla Steinunn Stefánsdóttir, violist Marie Stockmarr Becker, cellist Hanna Loftsdóttir and harpsichordist Guðrún Óskarsdóttir) sounds much more formal. Not only because of the ensemble's more baroque discipline, but also because the album draws inspiration – and possibly also a measure of structure – from a poem. Specifically George Herbert's *Love (III)*, which is read in full on one track, in part on others. This release doesn't foreground the timbral qualities of Ratkje's voice so much as her approach to recitation.

James Gormley

Mike Reed
The Separatist Party
Astral Spirits/We Jazz CD/DL/LP

For his latest project, drummer, composer and community organiser Mike Reed has assembled a Chicago supergroup. There's Ben LaMar Gay on cornet and flugel, Marvin Tate on vocals and members of Bitchin Bajas – Rob Frye, Cooper Crain and Dan Quinlivan – on saxophone, guitar and synth respectively. *The Separatist Party* is the first instalment in a three album cycle featuring different musicians exploring the theme of isolation, a preoccupation of Reed's since he read a 2015 newspaper story about George Bell, a hoarder who passed away at home, his body undiscovered for days.

Tate's poetry gives the clearest expression of that theme, as he speaks to the need for connection in a racist and classist society. As on his records with D-Settlement, Tate has a knack for disarming the listener with performances that combine righteous poetics with vulnerability and absurdism. *"You never like the way I kiss, and I never cared for your race play, too predictable and historically inaccurate!"* he barks over turbulent drums and cornet on the falling in and out of love saga "Hold Me, Hold Me". Along with Gay, Tate gives the music much of its grit, riding Reed's taut grooves while cutting across Bitchin Bajas' psychedelic drift.

Built around a poem Reed hear Tate perform, "Your Soul" sits somewhere between Ethiopian jazz and Terry Riley, with its slinky guitar, shuffling rhythms and intersecting synth lines. The Ethiopian influence is taken in a more energetic direction on "A Low Frequency Nightmare", its driving rhythms and horn theme setting up some great interplay between Gay and Frye. "Floating With An Intimate Stranger" takes us into a blissed out spiritual realm, all flute and twinkling synths, while "We Just Came To Dance" breaks it down to Tate and Afro-Brazilian percussion.

Stewart Smith

Raphael Rogiński
Talàn
Instant Classic CD

Polish guitarist Raphael Rogiński has built his reputation via interpretations of works by John Coltrane, Langston Hughes and Henry Purcell; just as his music moves across the map irrespective of borders, Rogiński approaches his source material with considerable freedom. In addition, he can be found reimagining Jewish music, and exploring

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psych rock takes on West African traditional music with Hizbut Jámm.

Rogiński's first new solo material in years presents his original work that distills previous music into a universal form. *Talàn* was composed in the Ukrainian city Odesa prior to the war with Russia and is inspired by Rogiński's travels around the Black Sea. For him, this sea between Europe and Asia connects disparate cultures and landscapes. "For me, the Black Sea symbolises something universal, ancient wisdom, coexistence and exchange, the cradle of Eastern Europe," he told *Dwutygodnik* magazine.

The eight ruminative tracks on *Talàn* originate from blues-rooted improvisations and reflect the moods and movement of the Black Sea rather than the folk music of its coastline. Rogiński's prepared guitar at times recalls a different instrument, as on "Cliffs And The Sea" where it resembles a kalimba. Rogiński plays with the physicality of the instrument and uses different tunings, with capos clamped on the neck of his Gibson ES-335. Amplified plucks and slides of fingers on the fretboard, combined with repetitive wandering melodies, make the album all the more powerful.

Miloš Hroch

Patrick Shiroishi
I Was Too Young To Hear Silence
American Dreams DL/LP

Patrick Shiroishi's latest solo album continues the exploration of his Japanese-American heritage he undertook on 2021's *Hidemi* and 2020's *Descension*. Recorded in a parking structure close to the Los Angeles neighbourhood where he grew up, it's an extended solo saxophone improvisation that makes stunning use of the location's acoustics.

In his notes for the album, Shiroishi references the Japanese concept of ma, or negative space, and cites the solo recordings of free jazz saxophonists Kaoru Abe and Masayoshi Urabe, with their intense silences and shocking eruptions. The music Shiroishi creates here is beautiful and occasionally harrowing, as raw expressions burst out of the stillness. Environmental sounds – traffic, wind – become part of the music.

On the opening "stand still like a hummingbird", a plosive honk sends ripples through the air. Quivering tones evoke the hummingbird of the title, before another guttural blast clears the air. "i almost said" builds on a series of triplet phrases, with Shiroishi blowing hard enough to overcome the smearing effect of the reverb. Towards the end, a high, metallic tone cuts through, like a blade drawn across a stone.

"tule lake blues", named after the concentration camp where Shiroishi's grandfather and fellow Japanese Americans were interned during the Second World War, begins with lowing tones and slurred lines. This tranquil beauty is disrupted by an anguished keening and then a series of thin, distorted tones that sound like industrial machinery. It's the album's emotional centre, establishing the modes he explores further on the squalling "hunting the eye of his own storm" and the elegiac "if only heaven would give me another ten years", where a gorgeous melody emerges from a series of trills and their flickering echoes.

Stewart Smith

Yuhan Su
Liberated Gesture
Sunnyside CD/DL

Yuhan Su is a Taiwanese vibraphonist who has lived in New York for more than a decade, during which time she has worked both in jazz and as a ballet accompanist. The title may indicate emancipation, but *Liberated Gesture* has nothing to do with free jazz. Neither does the confluence of disciplines result in some sort of third stream effort; the only thing that might deter a casual listener from pegging this music as mainstream jazz is the occasional rockish chunkiness of Dan Weiss's snare drum sound. From the winding solos played by Su, pianist Matt Mitchell and alto saxophonist Caroline Davis, to bassist Marty Kenney's contrapuntal tug and Weiss's rhythmic undertow, this music certainly behaves according to jazz convention. So, just what is Su escaping?

A tune titled "Naked Swimmer" and a poem recited by Davis midway through the album suggest that it's social, not musical confinement that Su wants to evade. The former, she explains in her sleevenotes, was inspired by a chilly late night dip, and the latter celebrates women who pursue their full potential despite cultural proscriptions. Form is something she uses, not something she wishes to escape. Harmony and tonality don't confine her, and a patiently swinging rhythm does not drag her down. She's only too willing to encourage the sweeter side of Davis's playing during the album's first half. And when she celebrates expressionist painter Hans Hartung during the last part of the titular suite that takes up much of the album's second half, she and Mitchell do so in conventionally rhapsodic form.

The lucid economy of Su's solos is the best thing about her music, and the pianist's typically streamlined expression of complex ideas during his own moments to the fore is the best thing about the album.

Bill Meyer

Alex Ward Items 6 & 7
The Recent Past
Shrike CD/DL

Dominic Lash/Rachel Musson/Phil Durrant/ Steve Noble
Trim
Shrike CD/DL

Eddie Prévost/NO Moore/James O'Sullivan/ Ross Lambert
Chord
Shrike CD/DL

David Toop & Tania Caroline Chen
Thought Forms
Shrike CD/DL

Four releases from UK improv/experimental label Shrike that show the diverse range of practices found in the music. Alex Ward's Items 6 & 7 belong to a series he began in 2017, whose name and titles refer to the number of musicians in the ensemble. Core members are Ward (clarinet, electric guitar), Charlotte Keefe (trumpet), Otto Wilberg (bass) and Andrew Lisle (drums). Item 6 adds Hannah Marshall (cello) and Benedict Taylor (viola), while 7 adds Cath Roberts (baritone saxophone), Sarah Gail Brand (trombone) and Rachel Musson (tenor saxophone). Partly because of its dry instrumentation, "Broached" (Item 6) has a more free improv ethos. "Tonnage" (Item 7), in contrast, has a big, fat ensemble sound from the start – on the cusp of free improv and free jazz, it's squalling and expressionist.

Trim, featuring Dominic Lash (electric guitar), Rachel Musson (tenor saxophone), Phil Durrant (modular synth) and Steve Noble (percussion), is also at the free jazz end of the free improv spectrum. It comes across that way probably because of Musson's highly individual jazz sound on tenor saxophone, which tends to dominate the ensemble. As expected from this stellar line-up, there's dramatic, edgy and muscular invention here. "This Is Why" is turbulent and caterwauling, while "Much Of This" begins tintinnabular and episodic, becoming more hectic with stentorian tenor from Musson. "Rather With Themselves" has a dirge-like intensity. In the longer performance "In Which They", Steve Noble eventually conjures a more jazz-like pulse, somewhere between swing, and what I call the pulse no metre of free jazz.

Chord – which has Eddie Prévost on percussion alongside electric guitarists NO Moore, James O'Sullivan and Ross Lambert – creates a sustained and often industrial-sounding electronic ethos. On "Textures_Edge", for example, someone seems to be drilling into a wall. An album for fans of the most austere and hardcore improv, I reckon.

The most idiosyncratic and original of these releases is *Thought Forms* from the duo of Tania Caroline Chen (piano, radio, bells, voice) and David Toop (lapsteel guitar, alto flute, cassettes, voice). Intriguingly, both participants are listed as performing "astro-electronics", with David Toop also on "bone conduction". The results, often featuring perplexing monologues and mysterious, half-heard or shadowy scenes, are eerie and unsettling. "Holy Smoke", one of the wordless tracks, has an air of disquiet, with haunting bells and bleeps; "Celestial Launchpad" has an uncanny mix of cowbells and industrial sounds. A rich and unique sonic creation.

Andy Hamilton

Teresa Winter
Proserpine
Night School DL/LP

Leeds based producer Teresa Winter continues her preoccupation with myth and ritual on *Proserpine*, her first album for Glasgow label Night School (Helena Celle, Molly Nilsson). Having previously focused on teenage seaside memories with 2021's *Motto Of The Wheel* and the hyperreal, charged imagery of film maker Peter Greenaway on 2022's *Drowning By Numbers*, *Proserpine* finds Winter engaging with the in-between metaphysical state of the titular Roman goddess, who exists between the realms of the living and the dead, as well as building

Poland's Gruzja invest black metal with absurdist humour and experimental chaos

By Antonio Poscic

The absurd circus: Gruzja

Gruzja
Koniec Wakacji
Bandcamp CD/DL

Wider social currents have often provided fertile terroir for the development of extreme music. Mayhem, Burzum, Emperor and others from the bellicose original wave of Norwegian black metal could hardly have arisen any time but the mid-1980s and early 90s. For its participants, the movement was about more than just music, as they tied themselves to satanism, reactionary philosophies, church burnings and a general aura of dissent. Since then, the Scandinavian scene might well been largely pacified and black metal turned into a mainstream commodity, but its unorthodox roots have spread across Europe.

Today, the most bustling black metal milieu can be found in Poland. As post-Communist traumas swept aside the terror of the Second World War, Polish society, similar to others from the Eastern Bloc, found itself in a fraught position.

Along with other significant factors, the political influence of the Catholic church and its alliance with ruling right wing parties – Behemoth's Adam Darski (aka Nergal) was famously taken to court, multiple times, for offending religious feelings – and the rise of the Russian threat brought forward an atmosphere ripe for the creation of edgy countercultural movements. But where black metal pioneers transmuted their experiences into unbridled aggression and attacks, contemporary Polish bands are characterised by an experimentalism perhaps even more rebellious than the raw bludgeoning of their Scandinavian predecessors.

Apart from Behemoth, who spent the latter part of their career creating increasingly dissonant and grandiose forms of black and death metal, bands like Mord'A'Stigmata and Massemord dictated the fringes of the scene over the past 20 years. Formed in 2018, Gruzja are a relative newcomer that belongs to Massemord's lineage of avant garde inclined black metal, with members shared with Furia, Odraza and Totenmesse and outré outfits like the queer noise project Biesy. *Koniec Wakacji* (*The End Of Holidays*) is their third and most outrageous album to date.

Described by the band as being "about the war and against the war" and "a form of reality from which there is no escape" the record is akin to absurdist theatre inspired primarily by the ongoing conflict between Ukraine and Russia, then channelled through a volatile mixture of black metal, punk, hardcore and power electronics. Each piece feels determined by its lyrics, brimming with cultural tropes, irony and in-jokes fully understandable only to people living in Poland.

While they have covered the Type O Negative-related Carnivore in the past, Gruzja's absurdism feels closer to Laibach's totalitarian subversions and the silly extravaganza of Let 3's anti-Putin Eurovision 2023 entry "Mama ŠČ!" than Pete Steele's proto-edgelord provocation.

On the opening "Jerusalem Shore", the band dive into a cauldron of hardcore suffused black metal while the vocalists shift from rasping screams to unexpectedly melancholy croons. Despite the sardonic bitterness and rage, there is earnest emotion buried within the razing riffs and the mocking singing on the rampaging "Aleksandria".

"Od Przedszkola Do Okopa" and "Kciuk Cel Pal" are equally harrowing despite their contradictory approaches, with the former unleashing a barrage of out of control metallic insanity and the latter digging deep into grim, Killing Joke-ish new wave and post-punk. While Perturbator's touch on the remixed version of "Kciuk Cel Pal" is gentle, the slightest synthwave sheen diminishes its gloomy allure. Elsewhere, two of several purely electronic pieces, "Następna Stacja Getto" and "Już Po Dzwonku", end up pinched between the industrial stoner of "Sałynka" and the atmospheric black metal gone news report "Do Pokoju", both scattering booming rhythms over warped spoken word, instilling a sense of deep unease, as if asking themselves: are we next?

While meaning might well be lost on anyone outside Polish culture, the madness of the music alone makes this album worthwhile. Although the full anxiety, desperate humour and sense of going crazy from frustration can't quite pass the cultural barrier, the inner weight of *Koniec Wakacji* nevertheless hits like a freight train. ●

on her fascinations with religious ritual and domestic magic.

Winter's compositions are precarious, existing almost as memories. On "Like An Apple", her voice sing-songs over diaphanous electronic clouds, repeating a phrase like a spell or a religious chant. Her voice is sleepy and hard to decipher, and the spooky, enigmatic atmosphere is reminiscent of Laila Sakini's work as Princess Diana Of Wales. On "Child Of Nature" Winter speaks as though recalling a lost memory or channelling a spirit in a seance. On "Flower Of The Mountain" – a minimalist nod to both Molly Bloom in James Joyce's *Ulysses* and Kate Bush's song of the same title (a 2011 reworking of her 1989 composition "The Sensual World") – Winter works with the magic inherent to significant words and phrases in literature, repurposing them as incantations.

As with her use of recognisable seaside sounds on *Motto Of The Wheel*, she incorporates sampled sounds of everyday objects and surroundings on *Proserpine* – but here, they are left to exists as totems in their own right. On "Plume", it's the satisfying sound of a beaded curtain clinking against itself; on "Fireworks", the crackle of a firework display captured from a distance; on "Blood Moon Myrtle", the rumbling purr of a cat and the shifting of its owner, its occult significance hinted at by its title. Slotted between her compositions, these brief domestic snippets are like condensed charms or raw materials for use in ritual.

In its quietly suggestive power and charged significance, *Proserpine* exists as a collection of spells, a record of ritual and hazy memory.
Claire Biddles

Marcin Pawłowski

The Columns

Avant Rock
by Neil Kulkarni

Akersborg
Feelantropicoco
Vinter DL/LP
An absolutely nuts debut from this intriguing Norwegian hardcore prog-pop-punk outfit. Prog because the time signatures here shift between unplaceable Meshuggah-style non-Euclidian arrhythmia; pop because tracks like "Breaking Out Of The Odessey" can suddenly swerve into hooky, gorgeously appointed choruses; punk because the hair trigger heaviosity and pummelling propulsion of the likes of "Never Ever Nothing" tear your face off with an Amen-style ferocity. Comparisons are difficult here but think of that mix of gnarliness and sheen Faith No More reached circa A*ngel Dust*. A cap peeler.

Coffin Prick
Energy Crisis
Bandcamp DL
Los Angeles based multi-instrumentalist Ryan Weinstein previews a soon-dropping remix project (which will include reworks from Tortoise, Shit & Shine and Battles) with this EP which features a Melt Banana remix of "Laughing" and two new pieces. Whereas the original of "Laughing" (also included here) had a heavy mid-1970s Eno feel, those Melt Banana loons have peppered it with jazzy, funky Wurlitzer, hollowed out the rhythm, replaced it with a frenzied surge of pulverising math rock and generally changed something contemplative into an absolute banger. The two new tracks "Energy Crisis" and "In A Field" are, respectively, krautrock in the club and krautrock full of psilocybin, and are highly recommended.

Gaswar
Girl Vanishes On Way To Jive Club
Rock Is Hell DL/LP
Recorded back in the 1990s but only seeing the light of day now, *Girl Vanishes On Way To Jive Club* comes from a supergroup of sorts formed out of the ashes of noise rock outfits Cows and Hammerhead. It's a deeply weird record. Opener "Get Down Moses" has the atonal chords and racket of prime post-hardcore but Gaswar boogie and get funky like nobody else. At times tracks like "Terrible Day To Have Eyes" and "Memories Of Steam" reach the kind of fuzzy skronky groove of Six Finger Satellite or Helmet, and for those of us previous entirely unaware of this record and this band, this is a great lost and found delight.

Reverend Kristin Michael Hayter
Saved!
Perpetual Flames Ministries CD/DL/LP
Kristin Hayter's previous incarnation as Lingua Ignota released four records between 2017–21 – traumatic, traumatised explorations of her experiences as a survivor of domestic violence – that are well worth seeking out. Hayter has since retired the Lingua Ignota handle and her new music is both a conclusion to, and departure from, her previous work. It's a startling new sound she has here, featuring voices of an unplaceable vintage, piano, bells and chains that carry centuries' worth of dust and shadow, the songs a distorted and twisted take on gospel that's sometimes slurred like a warped record, sometimes scarifyingly stark and always tightroping between redemptive faith and avant garde oddity.

The Serfs
Half Eaten By Dogs
Trouble In Mind CD/DL/LP
Cincinnati's The Serfs play a fabulous form of post-punk that edges into electropop but has enough garage rock sparkiness to never sound too immaculate. Opener "Order Imposing Sentence" gives you the full picture – bustling motorik grooves and Manishevitz-style electronics folding around Dylan McCartney's voice – but every track here explores another area of that rock-electronics intersection in a fascinating way, whether it's the Suicide pulse of "Cheap Chrome" or the *Alien Soundtracks* vibe of "Club Deuce". Up there with Sextile's recent *Push* but with an even broader palette.

Chelsea Wolfe
She Reaches Out To She Reaches Out To She
Loma Vista CD/DL/LP/MC
I wish I was a goth again. If I was, I would walk these accursed streets on this paltry planet with *She Reaches Out* in my headphones. Wolfe is an interesting songwriter because you sense she's written this material on acoustic instruments, then torn it violently away from any sound that might be familiar, or any rhythm that might offer comfort. The songs here emerge as titanic, epic – but not anthemic, which would imply belonging and togetherness. These are hymns to solitude, enmity and resistance. Check the way the opener "Whispers In The Echo Chamber" moves between silence and bonecrushing riffola like it's being given stage directions, then how it flows into the bristling aggro-guignol of "House Of Self-Undoing". Slathered in drama, utterly refusing to be anything other than dark alternative pop in excelsis. Where's my black cherry lippy?

Dub & Reggae
by Steve Barker

Aswad
Aswad
Island LP
Given their undoubted fame and success with 20-odd albums under their belts, it's a puzzle why Aswad have been so poorly represented in reissue programmes over the years. Also, the quality of their output is undisputed, even as they have dented the pop charts occasionally. Last available on vinyl ten years ago, their 1976 self-titled debut is essential to any collection of UK reggae. Resident in London, the band were formed by descendants of Caribbean immigrants, but their work was distinctively different from Jamaican acts. Couched in a modern soul-inflected reggae style that heralded the fusion sound of UK reggae, they talked about issues experienced by UK youth while retaining a Jamaican cultural element best evidenced by the album's opener "I A Rebel Soul". Lots of dub touches can be found on the set; also, remember that the band's bass player back then was the great George Oban, meaning it's no surprise that their sound carries a jazzy edge.

Glen Brown meets King Tubby
Big Dub: 15 Dubs From Lost Tapes
Rock A Shacka CD/DL/LP
Artist and producer Glenmore Brown aka the Godson aka the Rhythm Master was the first to credit King Tubby on a recording. If he's often left in the shadow of some of reggae/dub's bigger names, he has a catalogue to match the best. A series of indispensible Greensleeves and Hot Pot compilations from 1989 and 2005 respectively documented his output in fine style. 15 dubs here are sourced apparently from lost tapes mixed by dub master Tubby. The riddims on the dubs to tracks like "Father Of The Living", "Away With The Bad" and "Merry Up" may be familiar, but others are unheard, the reverb and delay on horns, flutes, keys and voices creating a sound unique to Brown. This is a reissue of the CD-only version from 2009 that was snapped up by collectors. Being a Japanese import, it's expensive but worth the investment.

Element
Nine Mall EP
Parallel Line DL/10"
Hiroshi Takakura aka Element is slowly becoming an established operator of note in the strictly leftfield subgenre of modern abstract dancehall dubs – his *NewDubHall* release from a year ago features in *The Wire*'s Rewind reggae dub round-up. On this freaked sludge dub tune he links once more with Duppy Gun associate I JahBar with whom he worked on his Riddim Chango Label. Check the track "Chicken Gravy Shorts" (!?) and its dub for a shot of a sound system on the edge of total collapse.

Ibrahim Hesnawi: The Father Of Libyan Reggae
Jakarta
Habibi Funk CD/DL/LP
Reggae in Libya? Well Ibrahim Hesnawi believes Libyans are inclined to reggae for a reason: their traditional musical rhythm

known as darbuka is very similar to the one in reggae. As a result Libyans loved the reggae style and easily embraced it. More specifically for Hesnawi, the lyrics drew him in, as they often dealt with issues such as the call for liberation and freedom, people's struggles and how to overcome them. In this spirit, 95 percent of his output is sung in Libyan Arabic to convey the message of his songs to the younger generations. Hesnawi recorded his debut *Hesnawi And Peace* in Italy in 1980. That album's tracks "Tendme", "Never Understand" and "Kesati" are included on this compilation alongside selections from elsewhere in his catalogue. Today countless bands play variations of reggae, while Libyan Facebook groups share old and new songs. In short, the genre's continuing popularity is largely attributed to Hesnawi.

Lee 'Scratch' Perry
Heaven
Burning Sounds CD/LP
This is reputedly the last album from the late reggae maestro and uncontested producer of genius. Once more he's discovered helping out another European producer, this time Frenchman Olivier Gangloff, who co-produced the album *Humanicity* with Perry back in 2012. As this set was started before Covid, work continued remotely, with Perry voicing in his Swiss chateau hideaway, but he passed away before all the tracks were finalised. It's a common formula for much of Scratch's output over the years, a set of competent but largely undistinguished tracks that rely on the old Upsetter pulling the cat out of the bag with his stream of consciousness lyrics. Top track: "Shut Up" – there's a 12" dub mix of it out now.

Prince Fatty
Prince Fatty Meets The Gorgon In Dub
Gorgon DL/CD/LP
UK producer, engineer and DJ Prince Fatty aka Mike Pelanconi must have loved being presented with a set of classic Bunny 'Striker' Lee digitised four-track master recordings, going by how quickly he set about converting them to analogue for remixing old school style in his studio. He was applying a kind of reverse dubplate process by which he created new structures to the original Aggrovators backing tracks engineered down at Tubby's studio by the master and his apprentices. Tracks include Jackie Edwards's "The Invasion", originally by Burning Spear; Horace Andy's "Don't Try To Use Me"; the instrumental also known via Horace Andy's "Zion Gate" and Don Carlos's "Ababajonoi" derived from Jackie Mittoo and Vin Gordon's "Real Rock" Studio One instrumental. The whole thing is a lot of fun – even dub purists will be seduced.

Electronics
by Sam Davies

AGF
poemproducer
LABEL CD/DL/LP
AGF's new album *poemproducer* displays her characteristic interest in the weight of each word as a sound, a timbre and also unit of (often political) meaning. And the asymmetry and internal interference of AGF's electronic settings for those texts makes you reach for a word like collage – but the acoustics are so high resolution, so clean, that it doesn't apply: she positions sound events with the same care and economy as words in a line of poetry. It's an aesthetic that can't always escape art gallery sterility, even if AGF does take the listener out into the world with field recorded pieces like "BYtheSEA", in which her voice makes the barest appearance towards the end of three minutes of Arctic wind and waves.

BBBBBBB
Positive Violence
Deathbomb Arc DL/MC
Okazaki, Japan group BBBBBBB suggest thoughts of an alternative timeline in which Boredoms were inspired as much by the land speed record attempts of gabber and happy hardcore as punk, noise and free jazz. By accident or design, they even echo Boredoms in their track titles: "GO", "Let's GO", "GO GO", "Sunshine". Frantic kicks pitched towards escape velocity hammer the lower registers, while emergency klaxon synths, airhorns and the occasional regurgitation of Van Halen max out the rest of the audible range of human hearing. Through it all are vocals fed through exfoliating levels of digital distortion, sounding like a water cannon aimed at the mix to fill any available gaps or crevices. Even when the tempo relents on "ARITTAKENO" the result is no less bracing, like a remix of a late 1990s Skint release in which absolutely every element is fed through a different effects pedal.

Gazelle Twin
Black Dog
Invada CD/DL/LP
This is UK artist Elizabeth Bernholz aka Gazelle Twin's first album as such since 2018's *Pastoral* and it continues the shapeshifting, unsettled direction of that record. But rather than investigate the horrors lurking in the countryside *Black Dog* builds up the claustrophobic intensity of a haunted house's chamber music. Bernholz has produced several film and TV scores in that five year gap, and *Black Dog* feels influenced by that mode. Rather than fit into recognisable song shapes, synths swell and surge in atmospheric daubs, sketching scenes and backdrops against which Bernholz's vocals cut dramatic, almost operatic figures, as if the archives had turned up an unreleased Amicus Productions slasher with Diamanda Galás providing soundtrack vocals.

Monolake
Hongkong
Field LP
Listening to this reissue of the Berlin based duo Monolake's 1997 debut collection you realise it's not so much ambient techno as ASMR techno – such was Robert Henke and Gerhard Behles's obsessive focus on the sensory minutiae and texture of their sound design. Take "Cyan", a brisk pulse made of soft, almost slippery kick drum and whispered hi-hat, and the way it floats out of a steamy field recorded rainstorm into the gauziest of pads and tissue-like layers of distant seabird

2023

glitterbeat

LUCIDVOX • That's What Remained

"Folk infused psych rock against the war...a potent rock and roll elixir"
-- *The Wire*

LENHART TAPES • Dens

"Balkan folk meets tape manipulation...few records made this year will be as masterful"
-- *The Quietus*

tak:til

BRÌGHDE CHAIMBEUL • Carry Them With Us

"Dark Highlands folklore...a trailblazer"
-- *The Guardian*

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harmonics. The twin travelogues of "Lantau" and "Macao" are rougher edged, but still delight in details, as reverbs and echoes play hide and seek with the beat. Monolake return to the hypersensitive luxury of "Cyan" with the slow crawl of "Arte", in which water samples literally wash around the smoke-belch bass, and the aquatic drones of "Mass Transit Railway".

Prado
Overload
Buh DL/MC
The five tracks of *Overload* switch between two zones – one is a chaotic vein of Amen breakcore, which occasionally ventures into the wet room of splattercore as snares are whipped up towards breaking point; the other is a kind of itchy, global post-grime in which stuttering beats punctuate queasy saw-toothed basslines. A mood of apocalyptic maximalism prevails although the tracks themselves are minimal in length – none longer than three minutes. This gives *Overload* a punkish indifference to DJ convenience and convention, but probably reflects an impatience on Peruvian producer Nicolás Prado's part to move on to new ideas, as if each track serves as a proof of concept and no more.

Woodleigh Research Facility
Phonox Nights
Facility 4 CD/DL/2xLP
Woodleigh Research Facility was a long-running, quietly industrious collaboration between Andrew Weatherall and Nina Walsh, and the tracks on *Phonox Nights* were still under construction in 2020 at the time of Weatherall's death. Named for the London Brixton club where he would road-test their productions, its tracks touch on acid, Chicago house and occasionally even a sleazy glam that recalls Bernard Fevre's Black Devil Disco Club. But in its steady tempos and patient, unfolding excursions, it feels as much a headphone record as one ready for the dancefloor. "Infidelity Of Time" doesn't develop so much as accumulate, slowly adding handclaps, congas, a rolling squelch of Moog bass and space-expanding dub crashes as if time were in infinite supply. "Gates To The South" sets an equally patient tempo while ghosting softly through chords that could almost be lifted from Apex Twin's "Xtal" – and the elegiac chords and unflagging rhythm effectively become the record's emotional centre: I can't go on, I must go on.

Hiphop & R&B by Richard Stacey

Grime Originals The Album Vol 1
Various
Grime Originals DL
For the last six years East London grime original Sharky Major of NASTY Crew has been working almost every conceivable angle under the Grime Originals banner, producing shows, clothes, podcasts, documentaries and music videos. Now *Grime Originals The Album Vol 1* continues in a similar vein, assembling more than 40 first and second generation grime artists to showcase their skills in album format. Riko Dan is at his imperious best with bass to match, refusing to take shit on "Chill"; Manga gets nostalgic on the title track; Roachee worries about letting his kids down on "East London"; Tinchy Stryder recalls the Chuckle Brothers with his nasal hook on "Have A Go". Intoxicating fun.

Kwollem
Melo
Rules The World DL
Eight years after East London MC Kwollem coined the phrase mellow grime and three years on from his debut *c2c*, his return addresses fatherhood lyrically and visually: on the cover he looks typically dapper and calm under cloudy skies with a black pram. Both title and coinage are fair, though Kwollem's grime with its old school soul loops edges into hiphop, and the mood is more melancholic resilience than complacent. As he admits on "Mainstream", *"I'm calm, but I've got more rage in me than a young Mike Tyson"*. But the opener "GIRLDAD" best captures the intensity of early fatherhood and the essence of the set. Told as a dad he needs to slow down, he replies, *"No, that's why I'm going ten times harder"*.

Offica
Hokage Pt 1: Hokage In Drogheda
MOVES DL
Hokage Pt 2: Hokage In Lagos
MOVES DL
Listing the ingredients on Irish Nigerian MC Offica's debut solo album and its EP sequel is both necessary and somewhat missing the point. Born in Lagos, raised in the County Louth port city of Drogheda, Offica incorporates musical elements from both cultures alongside the trappings you'd expect from his position at the forefront of Irish drill. A conscientious Christian pleading for forgiveness as he contemplates his sins, plotting an escape fuelled by money. An anime fan dropping Naruto metaphors and samples. All interesting elements, even the odd fiddle and flute. But what makes him essential is the way he amplifies the bounce of the drill pulse running through both releases (especially *Pt 2*) until everything simmers and bubbles with a distinctively African vitality.

Slippy Skills & Akme Beats
Deafth Spazio Randagio
Runt Life DL
In an era of much worthy rap from folk too old or anti-social to hang out in clubs, records like *Deafth Spazio Randagio* are increasingly precious. Luton MC Slippy Skills founded the playfully named Full Clip Magazine in 2017, under which banner he's put on a series of nights, a show on Soho Radio, but as yet no print magazine. Italian producer Akme Beats is their resident DJ, here providing scratches and spontaneous cold, sweat-inducing boom bap fresh enough to spark and harness show energy in the studio. Ringleader Slippy sets the tone, mostly absurd, irreverent and vulgar with the odd earnest interjection. 25 mostly UK guest MCs, from Slippery Trashmouth to Filth Mitchell, follow his lead keeping things inspirationally live.

Speech Debelle
Sunday Dinner On A Monday
Monday Sessions CD/DL/LP
The concept for *Sunday Dinner On A Monday* came to London's Speech Debelle when she'd thought herself retired, exhausted by the industry after two albums for Big Dada and one independent, ready to earn voiceover money, cook and fish. The album follows suit in effortlessness, the conceit of flavours getting deeper with time extending to her music as much as the food she describes with relish on "Curry Mutton". It's a meandering set whose highlights come when she moves beyond cosmic platitudes to more urgent passions and righteous fires. "Magic" and "Bless Us" sparkle with erotic energy; on "Susu" there's a contagious thrill when she says *"I don't care about your meetings or institutions, I'll burn the whole fucking building down, no lie"*.

Uber Magnetic
Roughneck Jihad & Junior Disprol Are Uber Magnetic
Plague CD/DL/2xLP/MC
The transatlantic synergy between the ebullient abstractions of Uber Magnetic's two headlining MCs is spectacular. But for sheer insolent grasp of funk aesthetics their debut really belongs to producer Chud Jackson aka Cool Edit Chud, Disprol's longtime partner in Cardiff's Dead Residents. Special mention is also due to the cutting and scratching of guests Krash Slaughta, DJ Jaffa and, not least, Sir Beans OBE, whose reconfigurations of prime Yoko Ono on "Now In A Minute" sound like the ecstatic birth pangs of a sentient galaxy. Over such landscapes Californian Roughneck Jihad maintains authoritative calm in contrast to Disprol's heightened delirium. "Brain On Drugs" has Jihad discuss using weed, Disprol at least half a dozen substances including *"H cut with Drano"* and *"everything that was prescripted"*.

Jazz & Improv by Daniel Spicer

Barry Altschul/David Izenson/Perry Robinson
Stop Time: Live At Prince Street 1978
NoBusiness CD/DL
This New York loft session marked the first convocation of a trio of heavyweights who were all involved in the first wave of New Thing free jazz. Yet, from its opening seconds, it rolls forth with an irrepressible sense of time and madly on-rushing swing powered by Altschul's crisply conversational snare and kick accents. Izenson unpacks constantly surprising bass bounces, reminding why he was a crucial element of Ornette Coleman's mid-1960s free bop, while Robinson reveals extraordinary mastery of the clarinet, switching from impossibly high false registers to fruity growls without sacrificing any of the over-arching pep. It's a joy.

Olie Brice/Rachel Musson/Mark Sanders
Immense Blue
West Hill CD/DL
There's a feeling of great purity about this session, recorded live at London's Vortex club. Certainly, the double bass/tenor sax/drums

line-up is a wonderfully uncluttered and direct means of communication and here, employed by three of the UK's top improvisors, it seems to mainline a certain core spirit that never strays far from the orbit of free jazz. Which isn't to say there's no room for abstraction. Ideas arise in waves, probing and unhurried, but underpinning it all is a baseline urge to burn. All three musicians display impeccable chops and lithe imaginations.

Ted Daniel with Energy
Live At Ali's Alley
Ujamma 2xLP
Taped at the end of an eight month weekly residency at Rashied Ali's Manhattan loft in May 1978, these somewhat sketchy lo-fi recordings crackle with fierce power, providing an essential document of trumpeter Ted Daniel's woefully under-recorded avant big band Energy. Mostly featuring tunes composed by Daniel and pianist Eddie Banks, there's an echo of Horace Tapscott's insistence on form and discipline in the large group setting, while still finding room for wild soloing from the likes of saxophonist Joe Rigby. Daniel's arrangement of Pharoah Sanders's "Upper & Lower Egypt" is almost unbearably joyous and John Coltrane's "Naima" wafts in ragged beauty.

Derek Plays Eric
A Suite Of Soaps And Other Assorted Sceneries
Jazzwerkstatt CD
This is the second album on which the Berlin based trio of electric guitarist Andreas Willers, electric bassist Jan Roder and drummer Christian Marien evoke a world where the boundaries between the avant garde and the popular no longer exist, where Derek Bailey might play Eric Clapton, if you will. In reality, it sounds like Herbie Hancock's *The New Standard* for Eugene Chadbourne fans. The Beatles' "I Want You (She's So Heavy)" is retooled as growling blues noise; Gentle Giant's "Cogs In Cogs" is a mellifluous jazz ping; Joe Cocker's "Space Captain" is an orgy of gnarled quarter tones. Why not?

Drašler Røysum Trio
BorderlessSoutheastofTheNorth
Non-Aligned DL/LP
The inaugural release on the Slovenian Non-Aligned label features Drašler brothers, double bass player Jošt and drummer Vid, who together with label head Mitja Hlupič kickstarted their own free improv scene in their native village of Bistrica ob Sotli near the Croatian border. Norwegian clarinettist Andreas Røysum was an early visitor and has collaborated with the brothers for the last decade. Together, they make adventurous improvised music that hums, buzzes, twangs and shudders. It's a restless sound, constantly fresh, seldom predictable, seeming to draw on all manner of non-Western musical and theatrical traditions. A little slice of utopia.

Camille Émaille/dieb13/Hans Koch
ÄBE
Confront CD/LP
Are turntables the most haunted of musical sound sources? In dieb13's hands they seem to suggest a ghostly presence – like a thick layer of dust – whether through the accretion of vinyl crackle or sudden blasts of unidentifiable, achingly nostalgic radio blare. Saxophonist/clarinettist Hans Koch adds phlegmy gurgles and piercing sine waves, while percussionist Camille Émaille interposes scrapes and rumbles, occasionally rising to a free yet restrained barrage of kick drum and cymbals. A sense of tentative unease pervades these improvised sketches, menace lurking in the wide interstices, like walking into a room and instantly knowing you shouldn't be there.

Kate Gentile
Find Letter X
Pi 3xCD/DL
A monumental release from Brooklyn based drummer/percussionist/composer Kate Gentile, leading her longstanding quartet. Not only does the three disc set clock in at over three hours, but every second feels dangerously crammed with dense, volatile information. There's an explosive energy at the core of Gentile's compositions, as if she's trying to see how much it would take to blow them apart. She's ably aided by saxophonist Jeremy Viner, bassist Kim Cass, and Matt Mitchell providing relentlessly ferocious rhythmic variations at the piano and bulbous modular synthscapes. Even the album's more meditative moments feel like the breath-held prelude to a storm.

Johnny Hunter Quartet
A Consequence In Three Parts
Efpi CD/DL
Manchester based drummer Johnny Hunter might still be best known for his work with Sloth Racket but in his own right he's also a composer of considerable depth, as evidenced on this third outing by his quartet. The five-part suite is based on 12-tone techniques but remains appealingly accessible throughout, whether trundling with a muscular hard bop heft or sliding into more fractured splinters. Tenor saxophonist Mark Hanslip brings a mysterious authority and trumpeter Graham South blows up some strident squalls, while bassist Seth Bennett heartily tucks into heavy modal vamps. Hunter, as ever, rides the kit with commanding joi de vivre.

Sonny Rollins
Go West!: The Contemporary Records Albums
Craft 3xCD/DL/3xLP
Collected here are the two late 1950s dates Rollins cut for Los Angeles based Contemporary Records. *Way Out West* (1957) was the first time he recorded in a piano-less trio (with bassist Ray Brown and drummer Shelly Manne), a format that allowed his harmonic ideas to flow like a crystal stream, which he would revisit many times. *Sonny Rollins And The Contemporary Leaders* (1958), recorded with a quintet including guitarist Barney Kessell and pianist Hampton Hawes, sits closer to West Coast cool jazz. A third disc of alternate takes from both sessions rounds out this snapshot of pre-*The Bridge* Rollins in fine form.

Red Hot & Ra: SOLAR – Sun Ra In Brasil
Various
Red Hot DL/LP
Following last year's album of "Nuclear War" remixes, anti-AIDS organisation Red Hot's second engagement with the oeuvre of Mr Mystery calls on Brazilian artists to try their hands at interpreting Sun Ra tunes. In a few cases that simply means slapping a sample of a classic Ra declamation over unremarkable nu fusion. But there are some highlights: Metá Metá & Edgar's crack at "Rocket Number Nine" is a weird collage of synth squiggles, sax bleats and angry sermonising; Max de Castro & Bnegão & Orchestra Klaxon transform "Brainville" into Ronny Jordan-style urban jazz that it would be churlish to dislike.

Daniel Villarreal
Lados B
International Anthem CD/DL/LP
If you dug drummer Daniel Villarreal's 2022 joint *Panamá 77*, this'll float your boat too. The same afternoon backyard sessions with guitarist Jeff Parker and bassist Anna Butterss have supplied the music for both albums. It sounds exactly like the informal jam it surely was – in the best possible way. In the pocket grooves manifest, hang around for a few minutes and end before anyone's had a chance to get bored. Props to Jeff Parker who has a seemingly effortless ability to transform any vamp – from a reggae-ish stroll to *Dark Magus*-style power funk – into something distinctly jazzy yet cliche free.

Modern Composition by Julian Cowley

Luke Bedford
In The Voices Of The Living
NMC CD/DL
Instability, performed with suitable urgency by the BBC Philharmonic, with input from the organ at London's Albert Hall, provides a dramatic introduction to this selection of works from one of the more substantial compositional voices to have emerged from the UK in recent years. Taking risks yet maintaining a firm grip, UK composer Bedford brings imaginative volatility to orchestral writing that he holds together with impressive technical resourcefulness. The five movements of *In The Voices Of The Living*, sung by tenor Mark Padmore and setting words from literary figures including Petrarch, Shakespeare and Joyce, enact through chamber music that is both tenacious and delicately precarious the present's continual slippage into the past. This absorbing set is rounded out by the mysterious gauzy billows of *Outblaze The Sky*, conducted by the late Oliver Knussen, and a concerto where saxophone quartet nestles with tantalising ambivalence within an orchestral context.

Joseph Bohigan
The Water Has Found Its Crack
Other Minds CD/DL
In 2021 Charles Amirkhanian, executive producer at Other Minds, celebrated his own Armenian heritage with *Miatsoom*.

Further evocations of that living legacy, with its multiple narratives of involuntary displacement, resilience and rerooting, flow volubly through *The Water Has Found Its Crack*. Bohigan, who grew up in California, has created forms that bring the individuality of speaking and singing voices into intimate and intricate relationship with instrumental textures that carry an aura of shared and perpetuated cultural identity. Their words are transcribed and translated in the accompanying booklet, while on the recordings of these pieces, they are entwined with strings or embedded within electroacoustic montage to perform vital acts of anamnesis. The dynamics of storytelling, filtered through the fragmentary structures of memory, exercise a powerful fascination.

Erik Enocksson
Räkna evighet som inte
Irrlicht/iDEAL CD/DL/LP
"Reckon eternity as nothing," says the title. Text derived from the work of Lotta Lotass, one of Sweden's more intrepid contemporary writers, serves as a touchstone for this electroacoustic composition in two movements. The first opens with male and female voice reading the same words, slightly out of sync, while we hear at a distance, barely audible, the voices of children playing. A drone develops, string-driven and fine-grained. Initially frail, stretched almost to transparency, it steadily bulks out with an air of potential menace, before resolving into lapping waves of choral serenity. The opening of the second movement resurrects and for a while intensifies the menace. Alarm bells ring. Then the choir returns. Supported by slow cello tones and swelled with feedback, a pair of sweet voices float into the foreground. After their departure, a trail of gentle interference crackles in their wake.

The Gurdjieff Ensemble/Levon Eskenian
Zartir
ECM CD/DL
Keith Jarrett's enthusiasm for the teachings and the music of GI Gurdjieff introduced that Armenian-Greek mystic's name to the ECM catalogue back in 1980. On *Zartir*, an ensemble playing regional instruments such as the lute-like oud, woodwind duduk and tombak drum perform compositions by Gurdjieff in elegant and atmospheric arrangements by their artistic director Levon Eskenian. Music, in the composer's view, should mirror the workings and vibrational being of the cosmos, and so provide, through its constituent elements, its modes, rhythms and harmonic relationships, a path to enlightenment. Heard on a less elevated plane, Eskenian's reconception of the music offers plentiful beauty and stimulating subtlety to energise mind and body. Arrangements of songs by earlier composers Sayat-Nova and Ashugh Jivani slot seamlessly into the programme.

Evan Johnson & Carl Rosman
Indolentiae Ars
Huddersfield Contemporary CD
"I can't go on", sang Ethel Waters at Harlem's Cotton Club in 1933. *"Everything I had is gone"*. That was the first performance of Ted Koehler and Harold Arlen's sentimental ballad "Stormy Weather". Amsterdam based American composer Evan Johnson's composition *Ground* makes allusion to that now famous torch song in radically deconstructed form. Mangled fragments surface fleetingly out of the muttering and growling introspection of Australian musician Carl Rosman's contrabass clarinet solo. *Indolentiae Ars* brings together pieces for solitary clarinet and voice written by Johnson over a span of 17 years. Together they testify with almost implausible eloquence to Johnson's Beckettian persistence, hemmed in by a sense that there is nothing original to express and nothing authentic with which to express. Rosman's playing and vocalisation throughout is improbably articulate and oddly compelling.

Guy Klucevsek
Hope Dies Last
Starkland CD/DL
Klucevsek's *Flying Vegetables Of The Apocalypse*, issued by Phill Niblock's Experimental Intermedia in 1991, revealed that Pauline Oliveros was not the only accordionist using that instrument to cross musical boundaries and break new ground. Klucevsek's approach, however, was fundamentally different, not least because of his unshakeable attachment to traditional song and dance forms closely associated with the accordion. This New York based musician's capacity to work artful variations on such material and to embark on unanticipated trajectories has remained a source of surprise and delight for listeners who care for the instrument's sound. His irrepressible sense of humour is a bonus. On *Hope Dies Last* you'll find a tango, waltzes and a hornpipe, plus the title track from that 1991 release, revisited and refurbished. As Klucevsek declares on the sleeve, "the exploration and adventure continue".

Mary Lattimore
Goodbye, Hotel Arkada
Ghostly International CD/DL/LP
Staying at a hotel in Croatia, Californian harpist and composer Mary Lattimore fell for its faded charm. Now renovated, the old building has lost that unique resonance, accumulated through long years of ramshackle hospitality. On her fifth studio album she seeks to recapture that resonance, to evoke Arkada's former appeal, while lamenting its current absence. With unobtrusive, yet telling contributions from friends including Meg Baird, The Cure's Lol Tolhurst and Slowdive's Rachel Goswell, she conjures up a bittersweet sense of location and changing times through six pieces that are subtly complementary, in their character and impact, meriting comparison to the finely nuanced ambient soundtracks of Angelo Badalamenti.

Laura Ortman
SMOKE RINGS SHIMMERS ENDLESS BLUR
Bandcamp DL
White Mountain Apache composer Laura Ortman, who grew up near St Louis, has lived in Brooklyn for more than 20 years now, experiencing constantly its vortex of sounds, its everyday rhythms, chance encounters, random eruptions of urban noise and plurality of musical idioms. The inspired title *SMOKE RINGS SHIMMERS ENDLESS BLUR* captures perfectly the simultaneously allusive and elusive nature of her approach to composition, playing acoustic and amplified violin, singing and embracing whatever other instrumental resources are required to express her intense vision. With engineering assistance from Martin Bisi, Ortman here once again channels her memories, sensations and perceptions into forms that are immediately inviting and consistently intriguing.

60 Seconds Each
Various
Corvo DL/LP
An obvious precedent for this kaleidoscopic collection is Morgan Fisher's *Miniatures* (1980), itself inspired in part by Herbert Distel's *Museum Of Drawers*, a cabinet housing commissioned artworks. In accompanying notes Holger Lund opts instead to cite strict time limitation imposed by The Residents on their *Commercial Album* (also 1980), and Wolf Vostell's coordination, in 1966, of 100 one minute events. As conceived by Kristoff Georgen, following a data leak that disclosed 31 fellow applicants who failed to secure a post at a German academy, *60 Seconds Each* features a compact soundwork from each, as wildly differing in character as the artists who concocted them. Snippets can be frustrating but also appetising, and there's plenty of conceptual fodder to chew over here, as well as a vinyl art object to enjoy. Claudia Molitor, Erwin Stache, Charlotte Simon and Mattin are among the contributors.

Noise, Industrial & Beyond
by Emily Pothast

All About HER (A Benefit Compilation For Hollow Earth Radio)
Various
Bandcamp DL
This 42 track benefit compilation provides a cross-section of the sub-underground sounds that emanate from Seattle based freeform station Hollow Earth Radio's low power FM signal. While the station historically boasts an anything goes sonic ethos, most of these tracks tend toward the instrumental and electronic, from the expansive drone of Veins full Of Static to the Mort Garson-ish synthwork of The Twelve Hour Foundation; the atmospheric noise of Fields We Found to the bouncy beats of Sermons By The Devil. Dreamy keyboard melodies float aloft on dubby rhythms, while detuned downtempo segues into textured ambience. Surreal radio-inspired collages nod toward Hollow Earth's more eccentric offerings. Like the station it benefits, *All About HER* is an enthusiastically curated labour of love.

Richie Culver
Scream If You Don't Exist
Participant DL/LP
Quasi-comedic aphorisms scrawled in chunky block letters give British conceptual

artist Richie Culver's paintings an aura of the absurd. Words, in the form of spoken pronouncements, also play a central role in his music. Sometimes these words are distorted through warped vocal effects, stretched and stuttering in ways reminiscent of his visual work. At other times, they are paired with percolating electronics and portentous drones in a way that makes them feel deadly serious, even when there is levity in their content. Themes of birth, death and human frailty surface with disarming earnestness, reinforced by guest performances by billy woods and Moor Mother. *"Please do take my kindness for weakness/For I am weak and that is OK"*, Culver intones. *"It's always been OK"*.

Jim Haynes
Inauspicious
Helen Scarsdale Agency DL/LP
I first listened to the latest from California based Helen Scarsdale head (and *Wire* contributor) Jim Haynes on a plane to Mexico and found it impossible to discern where the noise from the jet engine ended and his sound began. The first of two long tracks begins with an understated ambient hum. Sharp smacking and punching sounds arrive suddenly. With each new thwack, I imagine the plane colliding with unknown objects. Then a hole opens in the fuselage, sucking everything through it. The hum returns, like snapping out of a dream, but this equilibrium is not to be trusted. The second side seeps serrated textures, sliced through with oxidised shards. A master of corrosion, Haynes creates the sense that time itself has rusted over.

Drew McDowall
Lamina
Dais 6xCD/DL
This massive six CD box set includes expanded editions of the New York based former Coil member Drew McDowall's four Dais solo albums (*Collapse*, *Unnatural Channel*, *The Third Helix* and *Agalma*), along with a disc of unearthed rarities and another of live performances. Demo versions of previously released tracks peel back the layers of the legendary Scottish artist's creative process, while unheard compositions chart new journeys through vast chasms filled with reverberant echoes. The live tracks are especially exciting, teeming with the energetic feedback of the performative context. A gorgeous extended live version of "Agalma I (Folding)", for example – here titled "Fold (Live)" – draws familiar elements into expressive new contours, revealing the essential open-endedness of McDowall's compositional process.

Rat Section
What Stays In Vegas
Halcyon Veil CD/DL
According to the fanciful biography that accompanies Rat Section's debut, the London duo of Ratty Slay Johnson and Soopie were previously active in the 1990s, only to have their entire archive wiped from existence in 2005. This fictive backstory lends a veneer of humour to Rat Section's fashionably deadpan aesthetic, while the title *What Stays In Vegas* conjures images of the abject horror lurking behind and within the brittle, luxurious facade of late capitalism. These images match the sweaty beats, gritty textures and unsettling ambience of this gothy, industrial dance party for the damned.

Ritual Purification
Arrokoth
Bent Window DL
Makara
Bent Window CD/DL
Two new releases from Vancouver, Canada's Ritual Purification beam harsh Indigenous noise into the cosmic beyond. The first, *Arrokoth*, is an extended ritualistic meditation on an astronomical scale. It shares its name with the most distant object ever observed in our solar system, which in turn was named for a Powhatan word for sky. The second, *Makara*, takes its name from an aquatic, crocodile-like being from Hindu mythology that guards doorways and thresholds. In this case, the patrolled egress is a churning portal that opens onto a vast ocean of shrieking electronics and soul-scouring static. Purification achieved.

Size Matters
by Byron Coley

Marcia Bassett & Sergej Vutuc
Covering The Surface
Yew/Interstellar MC
This is soundtrack music New York's Marcia Bassett and Berlin's Sergej Vutuc created for an installation in Paris. Both of them appear to be using synths to make their sounds, and I'm assuming Bassett is using something akin to the Buchla she has been focused on of late. But there are definitely textural sequences where it almost feels like she's using the same sort of feedback arcs she employs so skillfully with her guitar. Although maybe I'm just projecting. Some segments put me in mind of Max Neuhaus's underwater compositions, which I'd not thought of for a long time. Never having heard Vutuc before, I'm not certain which elements of the soundscape are his work, but it's a very fine piece of longform tone improv, so I'm guessing he's kicking out the jams in his own way.

Beach Ready
Archipelago
Snow In Water MC
Second tape by Beach Ready, which is mostly London guitarist Christopher Cordoba's solo project, although he seems keen to rope in collaborators as well. The overall sound is drone-like and ambient, the guitar tones co-existing with percussion, keyboards and some altered spoken vocals. There are whiffs of late 1970s/early 80s pop experimentalism (a la Robert Fripp, Laurie Anderson and other walkers of fine lines), plus some other elements from as far afield as exotica. My fave track is "Redemption", which pairs urban field recordings with a piano part not unlike some of Popol Vuh maestro Florian Fricke's soundtrack work. Which is to say *Archipelago*'s quite a nice release, especially

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Bob Bellerue
Recorded On Stolen Land
Anarchymoon MC
Bellerue is a longstanding experimental musician based in Brooklyn. His newest tape is a meditation on the fact that he (along with everyone else in the US) occupies land stolen from the tribes and nations who inhabited it when the colonisers arrived. It's an aggressive and ornery slab of music, recorded with electronics and altered instrumentation of various types. This is not to infer there aren't a few sections of very comely harmonics, but the central theme is the violence of land grabs and concomitant horrors that emerge from it. Easy listening it ain't. But the music is as powerful and evocative as it was designed to be, so I call it a success.

Stefan Christensen
FD Grave & Son
NO Label NZ 7"
Solo guitar improvisations by this New Haven musician whose recordings and performances are a highlight of the New England underground. The two pieces here display some of Christensen's many approaches to sonic spelunkery – shifting plains of electric raunch (with a tone setting as gnarly as Sonny Sharrock's) interspersed with stark meditations for acoustic guitar (in the Loren Connors tradition), plus tape based disorientation emerging from the wings, and even debased neo-prog. Lots to listen for!

Anna Clock
Umbra
Fort Evil Fruit MC
Wonderful second release by this London based artist of Irish lineage. Clock has worked across a lot of artistic fields – text, radio, theatre, films, even haircutting – but their lovely music is the focus right now. *Umbra*'s main element is cello played with gorgeous dark energy. But there's a good amount of vocal work tucked in as well – sometimes sung, sometimes spoken, sometimes (maybe) found. But it's the cello that really strikes you – thick, sinewy riffs that are doubled electronically or allowed to stand alone. Other passages feature the cello and bow as percussion partners. Whatever way it turns, the playing is excellent and a constant reminder of what a great instrument the cello can be. From Charlotte Moorman to Ernst Reijseger and beyond – for strings, cello is king.

Cuticles
Pavlova
Wormwood Grasshopper 7"
Ace follow-up to this New Zealand quartet's great debut LP *Major Works*. Cuticles play in a rough-jangle style made classic by earlier South Island bands, but display a few more hints of Swell Maps damage than most of their kith, making this EP a slab of classicist post-punk constructions built around a sweet candy skeleton.

Dragged Up
Hex Domestic
Cruel Nature MC
Wonderful second tape by this Glaswegian quintet, whose line-up has changed since their debut. Despite that, their sound continues to explore echoes of the Anorak/C86 scene, mixing slacker girl group vibes with garage pop essentials. Some listeners traditionally sob about the style's inherent inertia, but I have always found its one step behind the beat craftsmanship alluring. And Dragged Up are experts at the form.

Robert Eggplant
Empty Campground
Noir Age MC
Robert Eggplant is the performative soubriquet of Boise Idaho's Luke Hayhurst, an environmentalist, sound artist and hiker who also plays a reconstituted acoustic guitar he picked up on his ramblings. Eggplant's background is in punk and noise music, but for the last few years he has focused on work that blends acoustic guitar and field recordings. Unlike some artists with a similar approach, Eggplant weights the recordings more heavily than the guitar. His work plunges us into the middle of nowhere with vibrating strings as our only accompaniment. This lends his sound a rural edge that is maintained even when the musical arrangements start shimmering in the distance. A sort of three-dimensionality to his process rates environment above all else, which is something I haven't encountered in such stark terms before. It creates a different kind of deep listening experience that is super interesting.

Major Entertainer
Tribute To Fraternity Vacation
NO Label NZ 7"
Alright... pretty sure this has no relation to Major Entertainer Mike H (who recorded for Amarillo), but I can't say for sure. Regardless of origin, this is a one-sided picture disc tribute to a 1985 teen exploitation movie I'd never heard of. It includes racy snippets of dialogue, commentary by the Major Entertainer himself, and bits of collaged sound that may be sourced from the soundtrack, although much of it sounds like synth-generated weirdness blended into the whole. The two trading cards enclosed are but an extra treat.

Manas & EMM
At House Unamerican
Radio Khiyaban MC
Lovely and blazing trio session featuring Manas (Tashi Dorji and Thom Nguyen) and Godspeed's Efrim Menuck. Not exactly sure how this came to pass, but Menuck piles up a lot of free rock guitar scorch to add to Manas's basic fire. Because of the line-up, I had expected this to vibe a bit like Rangda, but their meat tastes quite different. The guitar sound is far less fatty, and the percussion is a lot more diffuse and less skin-oriented. There are long passages where the strings and drums simmer down and percolate like lava bubbles on the surface of a pond filled with mercury, reminding me of some jazzier German underground rock from the 1970s.

Moon/Wits
Straight At The Sun Through A Piece Of Dark Glass
NO Label NZ 8"
Drum/guitar overload duo by a couple of New Zealanders well known to devotees of the loud arts. Andrew Moon (who ran the Imperial label) throws down rumbling layers of tom throb, while P Wits breathes out fiery layers of guitar amp flatulence. The results are a massive wall of sludge, pocked with cannonball-sized lumps of percussion. Sounds so good, my tinnitus is acting up just thinking about it.

Nunn
Meditations For Sick Fucks
Trouble In Mind MC
Second tape by this Chicago based harsh ambient duo, who began playing under various monikers nine years ago in Bloomington Indiana. Liz Mershon and RM were supposedly inspired to form this project by the ASMR scene – a niche I have not yet figured out – but their approach displays a more harsh metallic edge than its supposed origins infer. Regardless, the electronic duels spotted with vocal highlighting have a surface redolent of the quieter side of 90s European post-industrial racket. This despite the fact that the sides are broken up into a bunch of shorter tracks, each with a distinct if related approach to noise generation.

Thee Retail Simps
Rubble
Goodbye Boozy 7"
First single, after a couple of boss LPs, by Montreal's most monstrous garage quintet. In general, these guys have a real midwestern sort of sound, like a more punked-out version of the early Gizmos crossed with The Pagans. The tunes here tend towards the faster end of that spectrum, with a Rolling Stones medley that might well make Mick Jagger spin in his grave.

Sacred Product
Angry Red Planet
Wormwood Grasshopper 7"
Lynton Denovan began working in New Zealand in the 1980s (with The Aesthetics, among others), then moved to Melbourne, Australia where he has participated in various sub-underground shenanigans. Sacred Product's music has a nicely belligerent avant-garage edge, while maintaining enough pop propulsion to blow clouds of disturbingly catchy ear-worms into the air.

The Saints
(I'm) Stranded
In The Red 7"
The superb 1976 debut single by the Australian punks in three visually different editions, following various 77 designs. The UK sleeve's on red vinyl, Dutch sleeve's on orange and US's on blue. Kind of nuts, but in a good way. I mean, I keep all three of the original issues on hand. My only question is why they didn't do a repro of the first Aussie release, which had no sleeve, on gold vinyl? Is that too much to ask?

Send cassettes, 7"s, 10"s, etc for possible inclusion in Size Matters to: Byron Coley, PO Box 627, Northampton, MA 01062, US

The Boomerang

New reissues and archive releases

The Complete Obscure Records Collection
Various
Dialogo CD/LP

Obscure Records – the imprint launched by Brian Eno with invaluable input from bassist and composer Gavin Bryars – released only ten albums in its short history between 1975–78, but time has proven how prescient those stylistically elusive albums have turned out to be.

Bryars had already staked out unique turf by then, pivoting from the proto-free improvisation of The Joseph Holbrooke Trio in the mid-1960s toward an adaptation of post-Cageian aleatoric methods, albeit with a more accessible tilt, and the label's inaugural release produced indelible recordings of two of his earliest and most enduring compositions. *The Sinking Of The Titanic* (1969) is a ghostly manifestation of the tune "Autumn" that the band on the titular ship was apparently performing as it sank, imagining how it would sound as the music was submerged in the ocean, while *Jesus' Blood Never Failed Me Yet* (1971) takes a short sample of a man singing a chorus fragment of a gospel hymn, an outtake from an Alan Power documentary about the homeless, fleshing it out with an orchestral arrangement into a powerful meditation. Bryars expanded and re-recorded both pieces in later years, but these early versions still convey a special power.

In fact, nearly all of the recordings capture a fecund creativity from a unique intersection of experimentalism in the UK and the West Coast of the US during that window or time, as a number of composers and performers were rejecting academic formalism and honing individualistic hybrids that drew from numerous disparate traditions. One can trace the advent of ambient music (Eno, Harold Budd), the expansion of minimalism (Bryars, Michael Nyman, John Adams), the embrace of homemade instruments (Max Eastley, David Toop) and slippery collisions of chamber music with pop procedures (Penguin Cafe Orchestra, John White), among other sui generis formations in these recordings, many of which have long been unavailable.

The albums also document the first recordings by most of the featured composers. This new collection is enhanced by a hefty booklet with recollections and essays from Bryars, Toop, Eastley and Richard Bernas – whose arrangements of early John Cage pieces featured vocals from both Robert Wyatt and Carla Bley – along with essays from artists impacted by the catalogue, including Los Angeles Free Music Society kingpin Tom Recchion and Italian pianist Carlo Boccadoro.

The booklet reproduces the original sleevenotes of each album, appended by Bradford Bailey's extensive annotations and Walter Rovere's look at the album art. Most of the music remains just as vital and vibrant as it was more than four decades ago, and collecting in a single package underlines Eno's visionary aesthetic reach while helping to draw subtle connections between a disparate group of artists working in far-flung byways.
Peter Margasak

Barry Bermange/Delia Derbyshire/ The BBC Radiophonic Workshop
Inventions For Radio 1964–1965
Silva Screen 6xLP

Between January 1964 and September 1965, the BBC's Third Programme aired four radio broadcasts collectively known as *Inventions For Radio*. These were startlingly innovative broadcasts, conceived by playwright Barry Bermange and consisting of voices recorded from the general public answering questions on four themes, one for each programme: dreams, the existence of God, life after death and ageing. In an era when broadcasting was still dominated by the cut-glass enunciations of received pronunciation, these were real voices, with real accents – and the broadcasts generated an avalanche of complaints about 'rough' voices.

In retrospect it was fitting that The BBC Radiophonic Workshop asked Coventry native and eternal outsider Delia Derbyshire to edit the clips and add electronic music and effects. The results are astonishing, although for many years Derbyshire was not credited for her contribution; writings from Derbyshire archivists Mark Ayres and David Butler flesh out the story in the brilliant sleevenotes to this box which includes one LP per broadcast and two further discs of additional material.

As ever, Derbyshire's vision is overwhelming at times, precisely because it's unpushy, subcutaneous, emotional, dream-like. The tracks from the first episode *The Dreams* evoke powerfully the intangible horror of nightmares, the sense of inevitable doom and paralysis, and Derbyshire is incredibly subtle in the layering of drones, bassy rumbles and crepuscular textures. It's really quite impossible to conceive of how this music was created in 1964 when it sounds so astonishingly modern.

Throughout, it's the manner in which Derbyshire evanesces her own presence and the respect with which she treats the source material that really shines through. The *Amor Dei* disc is framed with a sense of light and space that's just miraculous, a flying buttress of sound that seems to hang from heaven, before the *After-Life* and *The Evenings Of Certain Lives* discs take you into narratives of grief and longing that are some of the most moving collages of sound and speech you will ever hear.

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Neil Kulkarni

Earth
Earth 2 Special Low Frequency Version: 30th Anniversary Edition
Sub Pop DL/2xLP
Earth 2.23 Special Lower Frequency Mix
Sub Pop CD/DL/LP

It's hard to recall or reimagine how confounding and otherworldly *Earth 2: Special Low Frequency Version* must have sounded 30 years ago. The fringe rock network of Seattle and the wider US Northwest had been thrust into the global spotlight by grunge. The Sub Pop roster had been home to the gnarlier end of that spectrum, as represented by Tad and Mudhoney. Other near contemporaneous releases such as Melvins' *Lysol* and Sleep's *Holy Mountain* – both from the previous year – signalled a collective yen for the crushing. But no retrofit contextualisation of *Earth 2* can quite account for how out there it was. Where others affected a nodding out posture as they dangled over rock's interior void, Earth cannonballed.

Some referred to the resulting cloud of sonoclastic ash – mummifying the listener, molasses slow – as ambient metal. The term had little staying power, but what it described has been formidably influential. Especially after the ascent of Earth's de facto successors Sunn O))), who came to prominence a few years after the former's initial period of existence wrapped up with 1996's groovier but less challenging *Pentastar: In The Style Of Demons*. Drone metal is the more widely accepted label nowadays, with *Earth 2* established as its blueprint.

The original album is a largely beatless three track miasma summoned by Dylan Carlson on guitar and Dave Harwell on bass, though drummer Joe Burns contributes sparse, prostrated percussion to the third, final and longest track "Like Gold And Faceted". It reflected Carlson's avowed desire to hear his favourite parts of the heavy metal and classic rock staples of his youth lifted from the continuum, distended and sustained indefinitely to hypnotic effect. It sounds like a shudder of tectonic plates, a proverbial little death in geological time. And it brought a genre at the time still popularly derided as troglodyte into improbably high minded discourse with the minimalism of La Monte Young and Terry Riley.

With respect, it's not obvious how the album's legacy is enriched by a new remix album boasting an esteemed but unsurprising cohort. Maybe it's just meant to mark the occasion, in which case, you can give a wide berth to my 'what's the point of cake?' routine at parties. Out of context and on their own merits, the tracks on *Earth 2.23 Special Lower*

Frequency Mix sound all right, good even – but not transformative. The Bug's reinterpretation of opener "Seven Angels" (retitled "Angels") sounds like what it is – a Kevin Martin production with his frequent partner in grime, East London MC Flowdan, rhyming over the top. Foggier, maybe, than The Bug's typical output. But that just means it could be Zonal or Techno Animal instead.

More intriguing is Martin's second contribution (credited to Kevin Richard Martin) – a radiant downtempo dub skew on "Like Gold And Faceted" which is the most counterintuitively unheavy track here, with its gossamer-light but queasy buoyancy. Elsewhere, the version of "Teeth Of Lions Rule The Divine" contributed by Brett Netson (Caustic Resin, formerly Built To Spill) hints at the latent Americana that became more pronounced on 2005's *Hex; Or Printing In The Infernal Method*. Justin Broadrick (Godflesh/Zonal/JK Flesh) and Robert Hampson (Loop/Main) meanwhile offer perfectly serviceable tracks largely in keeping with the spirit of their own respective oeuvres.

James Gormley

Khanate
Khanate
Sacred Bones CD/LP
Things Viral
Sacred Bones CD/LP

Khanate formed in 2000 when guitarist Stephen O'Malley of Sunn O))) met bassist James Plotkin and vocalist Alan Dubin, who had previously collaborated in Old Lady Drivers (later known as OLD). The trio recruited drummer Tim Wyskida and gathered in a primitive studio in Jersey City in winter 2001 to record their self-titled debut album.

A five-track, 56 minute journey into the depths, *Khanate* is almost doom metal, but it steadfastly refuses any kind of catharsis. They are forever creeping along in low gear, haunting you. And much of their work's power comes from Alan Dubin's horrified, revenant-like vocal performances, all whispers and screeches fed through disorienting effects. The bare-bones mix verges on noise rock at times, particularly on the closing "No Joy".

The second Khanate album, 2003's *Things Viral*, contains just four tracks but is once again nearly an hour long. The first two pieces, "Commuted" and "Fields", are each nearly 20 minutes long, and with even more space between O'Malley's and Plotkin's clanging chords and rumbling low end undercurrents, and Wyskida creating haunted house atmospheres from behind the drum kit, Dubin can slink across the stage like a cross between Richard III and Gollum, delivering despairing soliloquies disguised as lyrics. There are no verses or choruses, just an endless outpouring of fear, hostility and contagious anguish.

Things Viral isn't so much doom as doomed; the band conjure such an atmosphere of hopelessness that the urge to flee any room where the album is playing increases minute by minute. Yet there's an almost Beckettian black humour at times. When Dubin shrieks *"Mother! Father! Ghost!"* on "Fields" it's so overwrought it's tempting to laugh.

Phil Freeman

Meat Puppets
In A Car
Megaforce CD/DL/LP
Up On The Sun
Megaforce CD/DL/LP
Camp Songs (1991–1995)
Megaforce CD/DL/LP

Formed in 1980 by guitarist Curt Kirkwood, his brother Cris Kirkwood on bass and drummer Derrick Bostrom, Phoenix, Arizona's Meat Puppets were equipped with a wide and wild musical repertoire that ranged from hardcore punk and psychedelia to avant indie rock – prime examples of which are featured throughout this batch of reissues from the group's prolific back catalogue.

Originally released in 1981 (by the tiny artists collective label World Imitation) the *In A Car* EP was the first Meat Puppets release, an urgent sounding fistful of hardcore punk sketches, stapled together with several more restrained examples of what would later become part of their future sound. *In A Car* remains one of the most intriguing releases in Meat Puppets' discography, their instant reaction to how rock music was changing at the time hurling them headlong into the open jaws of hardcore, yet unafraid to guitar jangle like The Byrds on "Big House" or bash out a Magic Band styled lick on "Out In The Gardener".

In 1982 Meat Puppets signed to Greg Ginn's SST label, where they recorded an eponymously titled 45 rpm LP and *Meat Puppets II* – the latter an ambitious album that saw the group throwing Crazy Horse edged psychedelic and southern rock into the mix. Third album *Up On The Sun*, though, was their most confident recording to date, a set of unrepentantly catchy songs, each with a twist in its tail. Resplendent in its Van Gogh styled painting of a coffee mug cover and brimming over with electrically eclectic songs, instrumentals and trippy jams, its release was hailed as being a defining stage in their development. It remains, as Curt later described the album, "one that stands out". Rippling with an infectious joy, the songs on *Up On The Sun* reveal the group in full bloom with a new found direction and a sound they can call their own.

In total contrast, the *Camp Songs* collection is mostly made up of live cover versions of country songs and popular hits, a compilation of performances from their 90s period when the group achieved major label status – partly thanks to the support of friend and fan Kurt Cobain. Unpredictable as ever, with the occasional Meaty morsel thrown in to keep the hungry audience baying for more, *Camp Songs* is a lesser, but thoroughly enjoyable addition, to Meat Puppets' recorded works so far.

Edwin Pouncey

Meshuggah
Chaosphere
Atomic Fire CD/DL/LP

It's hard to pinpoint when Sweden's Meshuggah changed from the raw thrash metal of their early days to the inscrutable riff engine they later became, but by 1998's *Chaosphere* the man-machine hybrid was essentially complete. On their third album, the guitar and bass are overwhelming in their power, the air seems to have been sucked out of the studio, and listening is like finding yourself in the middle of an advanced energy generator. A contemporaneous video for the single "New Millennium Cyanide Christ" caught the group fooling around in an idle moment on the tour bus, miming complex air guitar and drums to the song with deadpan expressions. Far from humanising the group, it somehow makes them seem even more driven and implacable.

The cartoonish cover of *Chaosphere*, which shows a brain encased in metal and protected with lethal spikes, accurately reflects the imprint of the music. Entering their second decade, Meshuggah were tough and multidimensional. Drummer Tomas Haake's steadily robotic beats are surrounded by riffs and figures in different time signatures, or meshing into MC Escher patterns.

Around this time, Meshuggah had optimised their instruments for sleekness and power, their guitars moving away from the old school sound of fuzz pedals towards the high tech feel of signal boosters and line drivers. On later albums they would often bypass conventional guitar amps entirely and experiment with digital preamps and amp simulators.

"Corridor Of Chameleons" has virtually no melody or identifiable tones, and is centred around a percussive riff like a machine gun before a guitar solo finally fires into orbit. "The Exquisite Machinery Of Torture" pairs the alien, agonised screams of vocalist Jens Kidman with an inscrutable, monolithic rhythm which seems to have no beginning or end. Around the time of *Chaosphere*, Meshuggah were shifting the idea of groove in rock music from a steady reference point for the players to a rotating gear system producing inhuman levels of torque. Like Can, drum 'n' bass, or James Brown's groups of the 1970s, there is a thrill in appreciating a machine operating at maximum speed and efficiency.

Derek Walmsley

One Mile From Heaven
Various
Mapache CD/DL/2xLP/MC

To call this compilation from Barcelona based label Mapache a collection of "privately pressed" music, as Mapache does, is misleading, if technically correct. While most of the tracks contained on the double LP were in fact first released on microlabels or self-released, the term private press can also conjure visions of certifiable oddballs producing music that is not quite up to snuff, technically or musically, for the world of normals, and that's unequivocally not the case here. In fact the songs on *One Mile* – mostly the work of mid-1970s American singer-songwriters – are wonderful in every way, including their performance and production.

These artists will be unknown to almost everyone but rarity hunters (and, predictably, culled from albums that now fetch huge prices among collectors): Bobb Trimble, Naomi Lewis, Carm Mascarenhas, and 17 others. The tracks follow an arc roughly from soft touch folk rock to more radio friendly, extroverted 70s country

An unearthed 1964 session led by Archie Shepp showcases a formidable quintet

By Peter Margasak

Archie Shepp
Derailleur: The 1964 Demo
Triple Point LP

Year after year we're presented with archival jazz discoveries, vault digs that promise to fill in missing holes, capture a fleeting bolt of sonic lightning, or change our perceptions. Some titles actually live up to the expectations, such as the recent duo recordings by Derek Bailey and Paul Motian unearthed by the Frozen Reeds label, or *Evenings At The Village Gate*, a live recording of John Coltrane with Eric Dolphy issued this year by Impulse!. But as 2023 has wound down, nothing has matched the revelations provided by *Derailleur*, a jaw-dropping demo recording financed and led by saxophonist Archie Shepp that's exceptionally good and offers a glimpse into a transitional point for several brilliant musicians – trombonist Roswell Rudd, soprano saxophonist Steve Lacy, drummer Denis Charles and bassist Arthur Harper. The album was sourced from an acetate pressing of the session.

Like everything in the meticulously curated catalogue of Triple Point, the historically orientated imprint operated by New York free jazz scholar Ben Young, it's geared to serious heads. But that doesn't mean it doesn't rip. In the years prior to making this demo Shepp had been working with Cecil Taylor – part of a line-up that occasionally included Rudd, Lacy and Charles – a profound partnership that convinced the saxophonist to put aside his desire to be a playwright and focus on music. He had been part of The New York Contemporary Five alongside trumpeter Don Cherry, saxophonist John Tchicai, bassist Don Moore and drummer JC Moses, and his alliance with trumpeter Bill Dixon had already produced several landmark recordings. Young doesn't know if the demo led to Shepp's contract with Impulse!, inaugurated with *Four For Trane* later in 1964, a deal most credit to the advocacy of Coltrane, who was the imprint's heaviest hitter.

The quintet featured here were not a working band for Shepp, but Lacy, Rudd and Charles had plenty of experience as the dynamic School Days (where Billy Higgins was a sub on drums), a quartet with a revolving cast of bassists that was one of the first jazz rep combos, fully devoted to interpreting music of Thelonious Monk. Of course, nothing about that quartet was retro. Their understanding and commitment to digging into Monk's music wasn't nostalgic or concerned with preserving the sound of the pianist's own playing in amber. They proved to be a simpatico fit with Shepp, although it's clear that the quintet didn't rehearse the material enough, or at all, so the arrangements are fairly basic. In fact, the harmony parts Rudd and Lacy drop behind Shepp on "Sophisticated Lady" sound spontaneous. The recording also offers a hint of where those two horn players were headed, the latest stop in a trajectory that propelled them from trad jazz to the new thing over just a few years. School Days would disband in 1964, with Lacy and Rudd charting their own individual paths.

The music foreshadows what Shepp went on to do over at Impulse!, straddling his love of jazz tradition and funky grooves with exploratory, halting phraseology. His driving original "Dunbar Days & Miami Joys", named for the Florida towns he grew up in, is a deliciously limber shuffle with crackling energy from Charles prodding the leader's fabulously jagged, funky lines. A minute into his extended solo, Rudd and Lacy drop descending snake-like replies, a seemingly ad hoc gesture that nonetheless reveals a keen insight in Shepp's expansive conception. Rudd and Lacy follow with a couple of much shorter solos – this was Shepp's project after all – but both are marvels, especially when the latter masterfully traces a rhythmic shift, toggling from chatter to sighs. Although it lacks the tough James Brown influence that would turn up as the title track of his 1967 album *Mama Too Tight*, Shepp's deep ardour for R&B is already part of his personality.

"Viva Joma", a Shepp tune that he had played in a group with Bill Dixon in 1962, is built on an incessantly needling 5/4 groove that's almost metronomic, with Harper locking into a ferocious mesh with Charles after pushing through a brief introductory hiccup by the former. Once again Shepp opens with an extended solo, a rhythmic wonder that dances in endless sideways patterns around the groove, with Rudd and Lacy making excellent use of less generous space, finally engaging in three-way interjections, with the leader dominating the sound field. It was written as a dedication to anti-colonial Kenyan activist Jomo Kenyatta.

Shepp recorded versions of "Mood Indigo" on *Fire Music* (1965) and "In A Sentimental Mood" on *Live In San Francisco* (1966) so the inclusion of Ellington's "Sophisticated Lady" makes plenty of sense, with the saxophonist revelling in his love for the velvety tone and style of Ben Webster. There are alternates of the two Shepp originals on the flipside, but no Ellington, which suggests this was the only take, but the other fragments reveal how quickly and adroitly the band knocked this session down. It's not an instant classic or even a holy grail, as the band are clearly playing on the fly, but these musicians were definitely on the same page, refining their voices in each other's company. It's tantalising to imagine what this quintet could have done because this little snapshot is truly astonishing. ●

Archie Shepp, mid-1960s

Val Wilmer

rock or pop. At the latter end of the spectrum is the anthemic "Persephone" by Billy Hallquist, and Dan Modlin and Dave Scott's catchy, riffy "Loser, Lover", the recording of which sounds like it was compressed especially for airplay.

But equally prevalent are songs that betray the influence of introspective singer-songwriters like Tim Hardin and Tim Buckley. Alicia May's melancholic "Summer Days" evokes Nick Drake, including the tune's light string arrangement, but also Joni Mitchell – who, as it happens, had a hand in setting up May's session for this unearthed recording. There are shades of Phil Ochs in Bob Patterson's phrasing on "Friends Of Mine". Philip John Lewin's vocal inflections on "Diamond Love", which was actually home-recorded (unlike most of the tracks on *One Mile*, which were produced in real studios, with obviously pro musicians) betrays an obvious Lou Reed influence, and The Velvet Underground also rear their heads on Maitreya Kali's "One Last Farewell".

If there's one underlying inference we can draw from this far ranging collection, it's how arbitrary fame and celebrity can be. How is it that these great records simply fell through the cracks (seemingly) forever, while any number of far more dubious tunes dominated the radio waves in the 70s?

Dave Mandl

Het Pandorra Ensemble
III
Modulus 2xLP

1978 was just the right year to release a progressive rock album that would vanish virtually without trace, creating just enough of an appreciative ripple among diehard fans of that then pilloried genre to merit the status of a cult classic, sought after by collectors. The perversity of giving the title *III* to their first and only release is perhaps another indication that Het Pandorra Ensemble recognised they were swimming against the tide. Just six years earlier the eclectic, yet rather more anodyne fusion of *Focus III* had been a massive international hit for another Dutch outfit ploughing an adjacent furrow.

In fact, at its best, when the quartet are at their most focused and purposeful, the music of Het Pandorra Ensemble has retained undeniable freshness and vitality. This album is free of the bogus pomp and bombast that characterised the worst excesses of progressive rock's heyday, provoking the punk backlash. The line-up of two guitars, more than ably played by brothers Wouter and Dolf Planterijdt, with Gert-Jan Blom on bass and Wilfrid Snellens at the drum kit, favours uncluttered mobility, buoyant and flexible rhythms and a fair degree of melodic clarity.

Comparisons have been made with the work of King Crimson. Think *Larks' Tongues In Aspic* rather than the myth and Mellotron laden earlier albums and you will get some idea of the level of sophistication that Het Pandorra Ensemble were aiming for in their lean instrumentals. In the process they make music that is often attractive and engaging, although at times though they do seem to lose their way, and there are lengthy sequences that meander aimlessly. Live concert recordings, augmenting the current reissue, confirm that this was a group worth hearing, but also one whose music could occasionally slacken and drift.

Julian Cowley

Penny Rimbaud/Mikado Koko
Acts Of Love/Songs To Our Other Selves
One Little Independent/Caliban Sounds CD/DL/2xLP

Rudimentary Peni
Farce
Crass DL/12"

Rudimentary Peni's *Farce* is one of the shortest, sharpest shocks in all of anarcho-punk. Bridging the gap between their self-titled debut EP and its more darkly atmospheric LP follow-up, 1983's *Death Church*, its 11 songs were originally crammed onto a 7" – which gives you a sense of its compressed density and blink and you'll miss it pacing (this reissue expands it to the more spacious 12" format).

"Cosmetic Plague" and "Zero Again" bear some resemblance to the hardcore punk that was filtering over from the US around the year of its release. But where most hardcore reads angry, Peni's music feels authentically weird, a fact you could attribute either to frontman Nick Blinko's obsession with the eldritch horrors of HP Lovecraft, or his well-documented struggles with schizoaffective disorder. A track like "The Bile Ball" consists of one riff and is in and out in 30 seconds and still manages to sound utterly distinctive: a death rock churn delivered in a state of such frantic panic it sounds like Blinko is being pursued by creatures unseen and unimaginable.

Another oddity from the Crass Records vaults, Penny Rimbaud's *Acts Of Love* first appeared in 1985, the year after Crass finally dissolved. Its source material is a collection of 50 haiku style poems written by Rimbaud in the mid-70s, and it purposefully strikes a different tone to Crass: Rimbaud described it to an interviewer as a "simple celebration of beauty, done in the great romantic tradition". Certainly you can see why some Crass fans loathed it – its rinky-dink keyboard melodies and Zen philosophising landed some distance from where the anarcho nation found itself circa '85. Still, there's much to enjoy here. Eve Libertine's imperious vocal explores operatic realms, while "I Have Walked Enough" and "In My Attachment To Infinity I Have No Definition" set Rimbaud's poems to bursts of jagged improv.

This reissue packages *Acts Of Love* alongside Mikado Koko's *Songs To Our Other Selves*, a 2022 release that uses *Acts Of Love* as source material. Mikado cuts and splices the originals, subjecting them to effects or playing wildly with pitch and tempo. But she has an eye for locating and spotlighting moments of beauty or savagery, and the finished product is at least as good as – if not occasionally superior to – the original.

Louis Pattison

Spectra Ex Machina: A Sound Anthology Of Occult Phenomena 1920–2017 Vol 2
Various
Sub Rosa DL/LP

In the notes accompanying the second of Sub Rosa's *Spectra Ex Machina* compilations, French author Philippe Baudouin describes sound recording as a "magical act" which is "permeable to wonders". The pieces collected within – ranging from Satanic masses and exorcisms to cosmic electronics and easy listening – seem to have over-osmosed that wonder, swelling beyond delicate spook into fantastical theatricality.

The opener is David Behr's "A Séance With Elvis" in which the American medium finally makes contact with Presley, who confirms to him that death is not the end. It sets a tone which recurs throughout – a kind of tabloid sensationalism where, depending on your perspective, evidence of the paranormal/complete bullshit is documented with a straightfaced, if melodramatic credulity.

However, the most entertaining moments manifest when some disarming part of the medium's own hand creeps in, like the scouse twang of late medium Derek Acorah crackling through his voice, even though channelling the spirit of a person who spent their entire life in Bhutan or Wigan. On "The Elvis Presley Séance", the second time The King makes contact here, conduit Carmen Rogers explains that prior to his death the deceased was *"taking a lot of drugs"*, but is quick to clarify that these were *"medicated"* rather than something more frivolous. This could be an attempt to reassure the members of The Elvis Presley Fan Club also present, but whether this comes from medium or the messenger is unclear.

More ambiguity arrives via "I Cannot Answer You". Released in 1974, Uri Geller's collaboration with pianist Byron Janis, singer Maxine Nightingale and arranger Del Newman registers like an extension of the notorious spoonbender's Saturday night television persona, moody candle-lit orchestration and spooky soaring chorals undercutting a series garbled cosmic metaphors so that the true meaning of his incredible powers remains (of course) obscured.

Rather than embracing the shadowy mystery of these occult sound recordings, the pieces collected here flood them with stage lights, so that any kernel of doubt regarding the supernatural is expanded into a whopping, monstrous coconut of doubt. The curious theatricality of alien contactees delivering their musical testimony, or mediums relating the new creations of long dead composers, feels preposterous and fanciful, but it's this whiff of the charlatanic which make them so brilliantly entertaining.

Spenser Tomson

Masayuki Takayanagi New Direction Unit
Mass Hysterism In Another Situation
Black Editions DL/2xLP

Despite his significance as an integrator and pioneer of free music methodologies, Masayuki Takayanagi played just one concert outside of Japan. In 1980 a five-strong edition of his New Direction Unit delivered a politically charged performance at the Moers Festival. It peaked with "Mass Hysterism", then wound down with a fluent "Subconscious Lee" that established his jazz bonafides, should anyone have failed to discern them in the freakout they had just experienced.

Early in 1981 Takayanagi experienced an

illness that took him off the scene for nine months. Afterwards, he resumed regular concerts around Tokyo with a downsized New Direction Unit that included two other musicians who had been with him at Moers, guitarist Akira Iijima and drummer Hiroshi Yamazaki. But while the new NDU was smaller, it delivered an even bigger sound. By the time the trio performed the titular piece of *Mass Hysterism In Another Situation* at Kid Ailack Hall in August 1983, it had expanded from 15 to 40 minutes, and the trio sustained a withering intensity that exceeded the extremity of earlier landmarks *Eclipse* and *Complete "La Grima"*.

The initial effect is that of a wall of sound, but there's a lot of detail if you listen beyond its surface. Yamazaki's stamina never flags, sustaining a barrage of drums and cymbals that's unbreakably solid and texturally varied. The guitarists jettison notes, chords and the last rudiments of jazz technique, instead fashioning endlessly changing shapes of feedback that manifest and disintegrate with the music's writhing maelstrom. However, while this music operates within the realm of noise, the fact that it was made by three instrumentalists playing at once imparts an aura of collective effort that heightens its impact.

Originally released on CD in 2006, this edition of *Mass Hysterism* splits the performance across four sides of vinyl cut to play at 45 rpm.

Bill Meyer

War
The World Is A Ghetto: 50th Anniversary Collector's Edition
Rhino 5xLP

After two albums with former Animals vocalist Eric Burdon up front, Los Angeles band War stepped out on their own and almost immediately took off. *The World Is A Ghetto*, their third release under their own power, was the number one album in the US for 1973, outselling Led Zeppelin's *Houses Of The Holy*, Pink Floyd's *The Dark Side Of The Moon* and Stevie Wonder's *Innervisions*. The band's blend of jazz, funk, soul and Latin rhythms was a product of black and brown LA – instantly captivating, and when they added a tinge of psychedelic rock, they moved into the neighbourhood of Funkadelic and Sly & The Family Stone.

Hit single "The Cisco Kid" aside, *The World Is A Ghetto* is a dark, introspective album in the vein of *America Eats Its Young* or *There's A Riot Goin' On*. The nearly 14 minute instrumental "City, Country, City" begins with acoustic guitar and gospel organ, gradually evolving into an uptempo but somehow still melancholy funk jam, and the ten minute title track is positively morose.

This set adds more than three hours of bonus material. First you get two jams, roughly 13 minutes each, which later evolved into "LA Sunshine" and "War Is Coming" from 1977's *Platinum Jazz*. Those are followed by the piano-focused "Lonnie's Wednesday Night Jam", the self-explanatory "Lee's Latin Jam", the somewhat goofy "Blues For Papa Dee" and the achingly slow "This Is My Song Milton James".

The weirdest and most interesting part of the package, though, comes on LPs three, four and five. Each side is titled *The Making Of* and features false starts, jamming and studio dialogue. The ultimate effect is to create a sort of audio documentary somewhere between the take after take approach of The Stooges' *Fun House* box set and the jams from Miles Davis's *The Complete Jack Johnson Sessions*, as each of the six pieces from the original LP is gradually worked up. There must have been a lot of editing and elision involved in the production of these pieces, but the portrait they paint is fascinating.

Phil Freeman

Frank Zappa
Over-Nite Sensation 50th Anniversary Super Deluxe Edition
Zappa 5xCD/DL

Both stylistically and commercially, Frank Zappa & The Mothers' 1973 release *Over-Nite Sensation* marked the beginning of a new era in Zappa's career. The album's line-up featured the crack jazz pros Jean-Luc Ponty (violin), George Duke (keyboards) and Sal Marquez (trumpet), alongside the classically trained husband and wife team of Ian and Ruth Underwood (woodwinds and percussion, respectively). This band could easily handle the increasingly demanding material Zappa was now composing, and he took full advantage of their talents.

Zappa was clearly not yet prepared to abandon the basic structures and rhythms of the rock 'n' roll, blues and soul he loved, but *Over-Nite Sensation* shows him starting to augment those with elements of jazz rock fusion and European symphonic music. In career terms, the album was more successful than anything Zappa had released previously and, equally important, it created the template for the records he went on to release over the next few years: hard-rocking, singable tunes spiked with out of the blue instrumental passages requiring top one per cent chops, and the occasionally squirmy humour that surely contributed to his soaring popularity with college age guys. A low point of that sub-genre is represented here by "Dinah-Moe Humm", a tune best avoided for those not amused by fratboy-ish gynaecological jokes. Funnier and more innocuous is "Montana", which has the narrator dreaming of becoming a farmer who cultivates dental floss.

Zappa was a percussionist at heart, and what stands out most about the arrangements on *Over-Nite Sensation* is the credulity-straining rhythmic complexity of the parts played by Underwood on marimba (especially "Montana" and "Inca Roads") and Ralph Humphrey on drums (virtually every tune). The matchless Underwood, in particular, went on to become arguably the most important member of Zappa's band, and on this album you can hear her lightning marimba passages, composed specifically for her, beginning to define the Zappa sound. Also notable for his appearance on *Over-Nite Sensation* is Ricky Lancelotti, a wild-voiced former television singer who contributed vocals to a couple of tunes on the album and appeared at exactly one Mothers gig before dropping out of Zappa's life forever.

In addition to the *Over-Nite Sensation* album, this new box includes a wealth of previously unheard outtakes, alternate mixes and rehearsal recordings by this band, as well as a full concert recorded in Detroit in 1973. That live recording features embryonic versions of much of the music that later appeared on 1974's *Apostrophe*, and reveals the surprising amount of revision that material was to undergo in just a few months.

Dave Mandl

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New music books and publications

Dancehall : The Rise Of Jamaican Dancehall Culture
Beth Lesser
Soul Jazz Pbk 113 pp

A number of distinguished photographers were active in documenting the era of roots reggae in the 1970s, but Canada's Beth Lesser stands alone with her work in documenting the world of Jamaican dancehall culture from the late 70s through its dominance in the following decades. First published in 2008, this beautifully refurbished edition of *Dancehall* features a new introduction by UK fashion designer and art curator Duro Olowu, and a refreshed set of the author's remarkable and unique archive of images.

During the 80s, at the encouragement of Augustus Pablo, Beth and her husband David Kingston published the *Reggae Quarterly* magazine and hosted *Reggae Showcase* on Toronto's CKLN. Travelling frequently to both Kingston and Brooklyn, they were witness to the changing times as the heavy sounds of roots were displaced by dancehall and then the digital revolution.

The subject of dancehall culture has been visited many times over the years, mainly in the context of academic publications or as passing chapters in books covering the wider subject of reggae, but this revised edition now stands as the definitive source document on a reggae subgenre that has had enormous influence over the years. And this influence is not just on other strands of music, but through artists' and performers' self-expression. Dancehall culture has had an impact on lifestyle, visual art and fashion (including Aimé Leon Dore's Kingston 1983 collection, and Levi's Vintage and Farah collections).

As the author of books covering King Jammy, Sugar Minott and Youth Promotion and the rub a dub style while exploring the roots of modern dancehall, Beth Lesser was able to exploit the close relationships she held with key players in the Kingston music scene as a passport to photograph the producers, singers, DJs, sound systems, local characters and hangers on who all made a living out of the city's ghettoes.

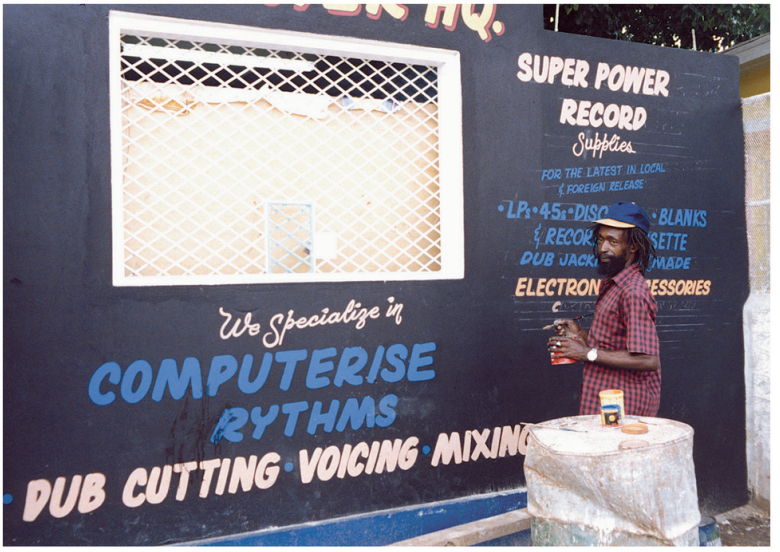
In the early 80s, Jamaica was in the throes of political and gang violence between left and right. 800 killings occurred during the 1980 election run. Even so, Lesser ventured into areas of Kingston where others feared to tread, because dancehall culture perversely thrived in a background of guns, drugs, gangs and violence – check *Born Fi' Dead*, Laurie Gunst's investigation of the Yardie phenomena exported to New York.

That this was a time of real dread is often reflected in the images captured here, where Lesser's subjects can be defiant, boastful, sometimes retiring but most often proud and confident. Given the part played by drugs and guns, which left innocent victims scattered among the music community, the book can also be perceived as a unique record of a dangerous and vibrant world, as often described in the tunes of the period.

A useful primer of the best records of the era is included here, but this exhaustive overview documents the emergence of women artists, the importance of technology with the advent of the digital era, the role of the cassette in spreading sound system culture, and the part played by fashion in establishing a performer's identity.

Steve Barker

Painting the Jammy's studio.



Beth Lesser/Courtesy Soul Jazz

Lost In Room: Mark Perry, Alternative TV And Related, 1977–1981
Richard Johnson
Fourth Dimension Hbk 334 pp

In a book-length Q&A full of snippy asides at Jon Savage and *The Wire*, there should probably be more not already found in Ben Watson's interview with Mark Perry in the latter (issue 190/191), or Savage's seven-page exchange in 2009's *The England's Dreaming Tapes*. Towards the end, editor-compiler Richard Johnson notes that Perry, never exactly shy of self-revelation, had not much wanted these conversations to go public.

To hazard a spiteful guess, their subject is a little over-aware that long-time small-label boss and sincere Perry fan Johnson is more inclined as an interviewer to amplify his subject's flimsier opinions (It's colonialist to enjoy Cuban music! William Bennett of Whitehouse is worth more of our attention than climate change!) than say, "Hang on, maybe I agree but let's dig into this..."

Still, it isn't a terrible way into Perry's puzzled, irritable, generous mind, as a brew of ideals and doubt, crackpot honesty and anxiety – with his sudden self-mocking South East London grin often breaking though. In this book he's enabled to speak at contradictory, unchallenged length, and then there are printed lyrics, information-rich footnotes and a solidly useful Perry discography (including ATV, The Good Missionaries, The Door And The Window, The Reflections, and more).

40 odd years ago the late Richard Cook drew a firm critical line in *NME* between PiL's post-Wobble quasi-noise provocations and what Evan Parker was doing at that time. Five years before that, Garry Bushell and Dave McCullough of *Sounds* ganged up to slam ATV's second LP *Vibing Up The Senile Man*, for losing the True-Punk plot. Perry detested such narrowness; after just 12 issues of the galvanising fanzine *Sniffin' Glue*, and then ATV's well liked garage-prog debut *The Image Has Cracked*, he instead faltered out into a formless imagined continuum encompassing both the free improv of the London Musicians Co-op and oi!, the irresponsible provocations of Genesis P-Orridge within Throbbing Gristle's slapdash noise-electronica, the squat-hippy utopianism of Planet Gong, the white-funk concrète of The Pop Group and The Fall's layered fuzz of inter-medium cut-ups. Not forgetting the infamous anti-punk halo of dad-rock classics round Perry's head on the first album sleeve photo: Neil Young, The Byrds, Grateful Dead, Zappa and Love...

Perry loves so much about all these various sundered tendencies. But such a jigsaw could never exist without high crackle – hence Cook's careful borderlines or the bullying *Sounds* slapdown – and Perry's love also stays spiky and unconvinced, as he chuckles at himself for being so pretentious or still caring. One such ancient beef is ATV left out of all the

Muddy Waters (centre) playing cards with Brownie McGhee backstage at Fairfield Halls, Croydon, 1964

Photographer Val Wilmer's chronicles of the blues over three decades capture both celebrated musicians and the everyday lives that make up blues culture

By Stewart Smith

Deep Blues 1960–1988
Val Wilmer
Café Royal Pbk 36 pp

Café Royal do an admirable job of making documentary photography accessible with their affordable pamphlet-sized editions. *Deep Blues 1960–1988* presents the blues photography of Val Wilmer, from the clubs of postwar England to the juke joints of the Mississippi Delta.

As a leading chronicler of Black music, Wilmer needs little introduction to *Wire* readers. Since its republication in 2018, her classic free jazz survey *As Serious As Your Life* has reached a new generation of readers. More recently, her photographs have been featured in three major exhibitions (most recently at London's Worldly, Wicked & Wise gallery: see On Site in this issue).

Wilmer is renowned for capturing musicians on stage or at play. The cover shot is of pianist Roosevelt Sykes at the Chinese Jazz Club, Brighton in 1961. As Wilmer recalls in her memoir *Mama Said There'd Be Days Like This*, Sykes was "a distinguished bluesman of the old school", who sold thousands of records in the 1930s and 40s under the name of The Honeydripper. A fascinating figure, Sykes had converted to Islam and considered himself "a Moor, descended from Morocco".

Wilmer writes of his sophistication and impeccable suits, and that's made abundantly clear in the photo. Debonair in bowtie and tuxedo, Sykes sits at the piano, left eyebrow slightly raised as he sings into an old-fashioned ribbon microphone. The suited British hipsters gathered behind him look like bankers in comparison. Behind the sartorial elegance lies a story of hard-won success. Sykes spent the Depression riding freight trains, sleeping in boxcars. Like many a successful Black musician, he dressed up as a reaction against poverty and racism. We see that same impulse in Wilmer's magnificent shots of BB King, holding court on his tour bus in a natty houndstooth suit, and a superfly Roosevelt 'Booba' Barnes, sitting on a barstool, a Stratocaster by his side.

Other shots position Wilmer as the fly on the wall, revealing the personalities behind the charisma and glamour. There's Muddy Waters and Brownie McGhee playing cards backstage at the Fairfield Hall, Croydon in 1964, a smile forming on the former's face as he deals a winning hand. A decade after their first meeting, Wilmer visited Sykes at his home in New Orleans. Out in the street, she snaps the great man sharing a smoke and a joke with Cousin Joe Pleasant and Reverend 'Gatemouth' Moor, one leg raised in mirth.

Those trips to the land where the blues began yield Wilmer's most affecting images. From 1976, there's a shack off Highway 61, long since claimed by trees and vines, its front plastered with advertisements for Barq's root beer, 7 Up and the circus. Wilmer finds the living blues culture in this disappearing world. Observe Guitar Shorty jamming in his wooden shack, an image that could be from the 1930s but for the flower power decals on his guitar. Then we see him in a blues joint, plumes of cigarillo smoke framing his head. Wilmer's camera sheds light on the communities around the music: couples at a blues dance, a young mother and her boys leaning over a jukebox. Her late 80s shots follow the path of the Great Migration to New York, depicting street musicians with their washtub basses and Casio keyboards. A gorgeous collection that reflects Wilmer's deep respect for blues people. ●

official histories. To be sure *Sniffin' Glue* will get a paragraph – but a piece like "Serpentine Gallery" is never held up. Perry's tentative response to being taken to this high and arty space by a girlfriend was immortalised as an homage to Emerson, Lake & Palmer's *Pictures At An Exhibition*, every Cageian percussion-splash signifying the next artwork.

Perry genuinely believes anyone can be an artist – just jump in and see what happens! – but he's unendingly suspicious of the professional gentrifications that then lend projects their shape and finality, their endorsed success and their pigeonholed fit in history's stories. And of course he also complains that if he asked what an art piece meant, he'd simply be ignored. Because of the sharp working class South London of his personality and accent? Maybe – though fellow *Glue* sniffer Danny Baker has turned both into a rewarded media career. I suspect it's as much the plain artlessness of Perry's curiosity. Unlike John Lydon or Baker, Perry's interventions are never a put-on. He's so haplessly a truth-teller: there's an almost childish directness in him towards things he doesn't understand, a lopsided grace and an energy to his intent and style, an intransigence in the tension between the ordinary lads rock-chat perspective and his (imprecise category alert) amateur avant gardism.

Even as a time capsule snapshot of small-label life, this project ends up somewhat under-shaped. What we maybe need (to ensure his current spirit isn't also airbrushed) is to sit him down with some strong-viewed free improv elder with a dialectical and a probing brain – I don't know, Keith Rowe? – and require them both to talk through the current ATV release (*Direct Action*, which is great: five old school *Sounds*-style stars); to require Perry to elucidate, Joseph Beuys fashion, its embedded stories, meanings, uses, what it could have been and what it could still be.

Mark Sinker

Ukrainian Field Notes
Gianmarco Del Re (Editor)
система | system Pbk 567 pp

Ukrainian Field Notes was initiated by film maker Gianmarco Del Re, who became interested in Ukrainian experimental music after the 2014 Revolution of Dignity, but started researching the country's diverse scenes more intensively after the Russian invasion in February 2022. His interviews with Ukrainian musicians took a diaristic day by day approach and were initially published on the website *A Closer Listen*. Some questions raised pragmatic concerns like how Westerners can support the Ukrainian war effort, while others focused on how artists manage their creative process in times of conflict.

The project is still ongoing, but 170 interviews from the first year of the war have been compiled into this single tome. A sister compilation featuring some of the artists involved has also been released by система | system. Including over 80 tracks running to almost eight hours, the compilation follows the chronological order of the interviews. Recorded after 24 February 2022, the overall sensation of the music is sombre reflection.

Although the tracklist is dominated by instrumental electronic compositions, other genres and moods also make an appearance. They range from the thundering drums and protracted metal dirge of Nonsun ("Days Of Thunder Bring New Wisdom"), through the melancholy dark jazz of Whaler ("Zrada"), to sorrowful field recordings. Documenting squawking birds on a winter day, Myroslav Protsan's "Ravens On The Cemetery" suggests the harsh emptiness of grief.

The combined reading and listening experience brings to the surface emotions from the first days of the war: a sickening disbelief in the unfolding events. In the early stages of the conflict many interviewees couldn't make or listen to music. Their energies instead focused on survival, fundraising and volunteering. Del Re equates war to another recent trauma, that of the global pandemic, and asks how the artists lived during that time. "There is a big difference between lockdown and war," replies Hanna Svirska. "During lockdown you knew that you would survive by staying at home. War gives you no guarantees."

About 50 pages into the book, the interviews expand. Gianmarco's questions become more involved and better researched. Further insights are gained into the experience of displaced artists (across Europe and within Ukraine) as well as the country's different music scenes. SA Tweeman, for example, the co-founder of queer rave VESELKA, is asked to reflect on the development of Ukraine's LGBTQIA+ club scene and whether electronic music has a role to play in the current situation.

Each artist is also tasked with recommending a book or film that will give readers a better understanding of Ukrainian culture. Sergei Loznitsa's *Donbass* (2018), Sergei Parajanov's *Shadows Of Forgotten Ancestors* (1965) and the *Ukraïner* media platform are recommended simultaneously by several different people. Later conversations consider misconceptions about the conflict. "The West thinks that we are at war with people who have human concepts, values and orientations," say the indie five-piece Latexfauna. "In fact, we are fighting against a completely inhumane, misanthropic system that is endless in its bloodlust."

Although it makes for emotionally charged reading, *Ukrainian Field Notes* is an important document with a practical purpose. All proceeds from its sales go to fund the Musicians Defend Ukraine charity. Almost two years into this war, the book's publication is all the more vital.

Ilia Rogatchevski

At The Vanguard Of Vinyl
Darren Mueller
Duke University Press Hbk 424 pp

This excellent title embraces art, technology and economics. Its accessible scholarship changes our understanding of a familiar artefact. Darren Mueller examines how the advent of the long playing record in 1948 revolutionised the recording and production of jazz. Recordings began outselling sheet music for the first time, becoming the dominant medium for musical distribution and consumption. The LP's increased fidelity and playback capacity allowed longer performances to fit onto a record, fostering a period of artistic exploration. As Mueller shows, the practice of making LPs changed how jazz was created and understood.

But, he also stresses, the LP was a focus of uneven power relations in a heavily segregated music industry that was not gender-inclusive. Black musicians had enormous influence onstage, but minimal control over artistic representations on record. Nonetheless, Louis Armstrong, Miles Davis, Duke Ellington and Charles Mingus redefined prevailing notions of race and cultural difference, creating an expansive sonic terrain of Black modernity.

As Mueller explains, the LP's ubiquity after the 1950s makes its adoption seem uneventful. But in fact, for nearly a decade, there was no cross-industry standardisation, and shops sold numerous types of records varying in size, speed and sound quality. The 10" was standard for all forms of popular music in the first five years of the LP; a few years on, the format was one forgotten playback medium among many. Eventually, producers and executives took full advantage of the LP format, creating concept albums. Jackets with artwork and sleevenotes replaced the 78's blank paper sleeves.

I hadn't realised how the LP converged with another new technology, electromagnetic tape. These innovations need to be understood in relation to each other. Before tape appeared in the late 40s, a stylus physically cut grooves into a thickly coated wax discography or master. With tape, sounds were encoded onto a thin, magnetisable strip of plastic film that captured clear, uninterrupted performances with minimum background noise. Crucially, tape could be edited. Interestingly, says Mueller, discourse during the LP's early years ignored the innovations of tape recording.

The book's six chapters chart the period from the LP's introduction in 1948 to the normalisation of stereo playback in 1959. Mass market Black music appeared almost exclusively through the singles market, so jazz's repackaging on LP hastened its decoupling from other Black popular music, Mueller argues – a process that had started in the previous decade. Print media propagated the music as artful expression. These insights flow from the book's synthesis of art, technology and economics.

Chapter two explores the small but influential jazz label Prestige. The label had an informal production aesthetic, proprietor Bob Weinstock recalled: "It was all very loose. I hated charts. I hated arrangements. That's where me and Alfred [Lion, of Blue Note] differed." By assuming the role as a steward of jazz history, Mueller argues, Weinstock expressed a white masculine authority. When Miles Davis first recorded for Prestige in 1951, the label largely ignored the jukeboxes and radio stations at the centre of Black life, targeting white male collectors. By 1957, Weinstock recognised that Black audiences were essential, and increased production of 45 rpm singles, the primary medium for jukeboxes and Black radio stations.

Mueller quotes the jazz historian and academic Nichole Rustin-Paschal – "To nurture jazz was to instruct consumers on how to be

fans" – and argues that while Weinstock's documentary impulse showed his enthusiasm for the music, it was also a gendered expression of economic power. This may be heavy-handed. I don't know about Weinstock, but Lester Koenig, proprietor of Contemporary Records, was a hero of the music; he was a friend and supporter of the musicians, as they attested.

Other chapters discuss Ellington at Newport, and Cannonball Adderley's Quintet in San Francisco. Mueller's account of tape-splicing on *Mingus Ah Um* is revelatory – at least 17 splices across six of nine tracks removed 11 minutes of music. In performance, Mingus cultivated a sense of organised chaos, but this album reveals post-production intentionality. Mueller's title is one of my jazz books of the year, for sure.

Andy Hamilton

Too Much Too Young: Rude Boys, Racism And The Soundtrack Of A Generation – The 2 Tone Records Story

Daniel Rachel

White Rabbit Hbk 544 pp

I'm 'local', live in Coventry and of course approached this book with my eyebrow already half-cocked for potential pitfalls, errors, oversights. A few pages in, that eyebrow had safely returned to being lateral. Daniel Rachel has created a brilliant book here, lengthy but suggestive, exhaustive in research but not exhausting to read, and a fitting account of one of British culture's most epochal moments. Crucially, he's not committed the cardinal errors of simplification and evasion that so many previous documenters of 2 Tone stumbled into. As a culture and an attitude, Two Tone was long in gestation even if it only burned brightly for a short moment.

Rachel is strong on detailing the socioeconomic background behind Coventry and 2 Tone, and gratifyingly unsparing in detailing precisely the point of friction that made 2 Tone so important. Race and racism is written about confidently throughout, and is a vital part of the story he enables. I say 'enables', because although Rachel has a great narrative eye, he lets the protagonists speak – the revelatory interviews with all the major players also provide key political and musical contexts of how a few Coventry ne'er-do-wells could get a song like "Ghost Town" to the top of the charts in the grim early years of Thatcher's regime, and, further, how Madness and The Beat also encountered the violent response to Two Tone that seethes underneath the narrative from the off.

In retrospect, 2 Tone seems almost miraculous: a multiracial, multi-gendered community of artists and a label behind some of the most scintillatingly danceable and political pop in UK history. Even though he details every single twist and turn that takes 2 Tone from local scene to global prominence, Rachel keeps the miracle intact with all its inherent contradictions.

One of the impressive things about the early chapters bringing the cast of characters together is how unflinching Rachel is about class. Far too often 2 Tone has been mischaracterised with 'authenticity', a constrictive 'working class' identity often conferred upon it by middle class journalists. Rachel details the mix of grammar school boys like Jerry Dammers and working class boys like Terry Hall and Lynval Golding that fed into what made The Specials so special.

He sets the political context of the times up with precision. As the chapters move through 2 Tone's rise, you feel a galvanising sense of just how mindblowing the movement was in these grey, racist, riot-strewn isles. Rachel achieves a superb balance between on the road chaos and in the studio care and craft. His detailing of all aspects of the creation of 2 Tone music, particularly the making of *More Specials*, is as thrilling as the mayhem he writes about in 2 Tone's confrontations with the National Front and the mainstream music business.

Of course, the dissolution of the label and movement is heartbreaking when it comes, but you're left feeling that the scale of 2 Tone's ambition (particularly the international reach of its anti-apartheid activities) remains utterly inspirational. Nothing is left out of this definitive book. Take it from a Coventrian.

Neil Kulkarni

NOTHING IS POSSIBLE NERVOUSNESS, OR IMMORALITY DON'T WAIT TO BE HUNTED TO HIDE/SPOILT HEALTH

TRS: The Fucking Terrible Receding Shapes, Trading As TRIPLE NEGATIVE

Penultimate Press PBK 248 pp + MC

A certain mystique surrounds the group known as Triple Negative – or, to give them their full billing here, TRS: The Fucking Terrible Receding Shapes, Trading As TRIPLE NEGATIVE. What we do know is this. They're a trio based in London, but international in scope: Matthew Hyland hails from New Zealand, Anja Büchele from Germany and Dennis Debitsev from Romania. They've played together in some capacity for around two decades, although their publicly released music is largely limited to a handful of albums of outré rock deconstruction for Mark Harwood's Penultimate Press imprint. And while this new package – a book and accompanying cassette – allows us to view the group's activities from a new angle, it doesn't exactly dispel the lingering mystery. On the contrary, this is Triple Negative's strangest transmission yet.

The book is a beast. Approaching 250 pages in length, it compiles poetry, drawings, lyrics, comic books and essays penned between 1996 and the present, some of which have previously been published in left wing politics/culture journals *Mute* and *Datacide*. The artwork is a mix of scrapbook collage and spidery pen and ink images that brings to mind Situationist détournement or the raw complexity characteristic to some art brut. The writing, meanwhile, is academic with a twist of polemic, exploring themes of human freedom and liberty in an era in which systems of state control grow more powerful and authoritarian with each passing year.

"New Age Policing" documents how genetics, biology and big data are feeding into a new mode of surveillance policing. "Down With Adulthood And Childhood!" is a critique of the UK's health and education system that excoricates sentimental cries about "the death of childhood", punitive government policy targeting poor families and the growing influence of private military contractors in the education space. And a review of Robert Dellar's *Splitting In Two: Mad Pride And Punk Rock Oblivion* analyses the late Mad Pride founder's sometimes anarchic advocacy for the mentally ill in the face of an establishment hell-bent on pathologisation and incarceration.

The music collected on the accompanying cassette is, even by Triple Negative's standards, somewhat impenetrable. The mood is private, communal, a little deranged. The sound is scraping, squalling, nagging, clattering, chaotic and blown out, but performed with total conviction. Here and there, bizarre song shapes emerge from the wreckage: the cultic chants of "Both Hands Lost On Baby Bonds Bet"; the Theatre Of Eternal Music drones of "Teeth Of My Plastic Skin"; a mutant chanson titled "Niemandsland" ("No Man's Land").

If Triple Negative's music sometimes feels pitched to bewilder or repel, viewed in the context of the book that at least makes a certain sense: these are sick sounds for a profoundly sick society. But you could also decode *NOTHING IS POSSIBLE...* as an expression of defiance, a freedom born out of angry refusal.

Louis Pattison

The Specials: *Ghost Town* on the Thames riverbank, London, 1981

Chalkie Davies

On Screen

Films & DVDs

Midori Takada: Japan On Film
Kings Place, London, UK

The dark stage is peppered with cymbals that resemble flowers gazing at an artificial sun. A solitary bell is heard but its source is unclear. Midori Takada emerges from an aisle and ascends onto the stage, intermittently striking an upturned metal bowl. She walks through the field of alloy disks, picking between them, emphasising their tonal differences, before stopping at a suspended gong. Various textures are drawn from it. Takada scrapes the surface with brushes, then her thumb, persuading the instrument to sing like a migrating whale. She removes her black cloak, letting it drop to the floor – a deliberate gesture bookending her theatrical entrance.

Tonight's performance centres around new scores for silent films about Japan. These surviving shorts, which are held at the BFI National Archive, date back to the end of the Meiji era, when Western film makers fixed their collective gaze on the country. Captured by outsiders at the dawn of the 20th century, Japan's landscapes, buildings, fashions, customs and people are inevitably exoticised. However, the films remain vital records of a nation transitioning into modernity, and their restoration and digitisation was done to coincide with the 2020/21 Tokyo Olympics.

Takada's live score makes full use of the percussive palette incorporating cymbals, variously pitched toms, marimba, grand piano and prerecorded sounds. The emphasis is always on the melodic potential of the instruments, particularly where the drums are concerned. Two of the toms are turned sideways, positioned at head height, while the remaining drums rest on the floor. Takada darts across them, with each isolated hit conjuring up an unexpected melodious note. Collectively, her rolls are evocative of countless liberated cobblestones flying across city barricades and raining fast onto the street.

As images of the Dotonbori Canal in Osaka flash upon the screen, Takada moves over to the marimba. Her complex repeating patterns instantly remind me of Philip Glass or, more precisely, Christoph Sietzen's marimba rendering of the *Glassworks* track "Opening". Whereas that piece is steeped in a fragile melancholy, Takada's playing is vibrant, especially when synced to visions of urban life lost to time: people under parasols escaping the rain, street food vendors, a bonsai tree market, children lining up for school, silk factories, a parade celebrating the country's victory in the 1904–05 Russo-Japanese War.

The most arresting film is *The Ainus Of Japan*, which documents the cultural rites of an Indigenous group native to Hokkaido and Russia's far east. We are shown dancing rituals, a drinking ceremony and married women marked by moustache-like facial tattoos. The Ainu were forced to assimilate into Japanese society and this anthropological record is a rare window into their culture.

The films are not showing constantly and when they're turned off, Takada's playing is brought to the centre. As she sits behind the piano and jams to prerecorded sounds emanating from the PA, there is a sense she is duetting with ghosts. Throughout the concert, Takada speaks to the audience about "beautiful memories from childhood" like the taste of honey and dates, a coconut tree standing on a desert hilltop or the "sound of red thread being torn". These brief quizzical phrases contain a quotidian kind of poetry that complements the picturesque visions of Japan from 100 years ago. Like most memories, these images are emotionally vivid but fleeting and prone to distortion.

Ilia Rogatchevski

Midori Takada

Subotnick: Portrait Of An Electronic Music Pioneer
Robert Fantinatto (Director)
Waveshaper Media 2022, 87 mins

Subotnick begins, fittingly enough, with pioneering electronic composer Morton Subotnick's performance at the 2016 Trip Metal festival, founded by the members of Wolf Eyes. At this moment in time, the then-octogenarian was incredulous that anyone still listened to his work, never mind what they might be getting out of it. When discussing his current status as a groundbreaking influence on contemporary experimental music, Subotnick describes himself as "a father who has a child he didn't know he had".

Toronto based film maker Robert Fantinatto brings his own connections to this family tree, having previously directed the 2014 modular synth documentary *I Dream Of Wires*. One half of *Subotnick* follows the composer through the creation of his multimedia

Monika S Jakubowska

chamber opera *Crowds And Power*, featuring harrowing performances from his wife Joan La Barbara. The other segments show Subotnick in conversation with peers from his past, such as fellow composer Ramón Sender, with whom he co-founded the San Francisco Tape Music Center in the early 1960s. During these years, Subotnick worked with Don Buchla to develop the Buchla 100 Series Modular Electronic Music System, a West Coast answer to the Moog, allowing composers to conjure otherworldly sounds without leaving the studio.

While Sender describes his work as "neo-primitivism", focusing on ceremonial chants from his native country of Spain, Subotnick has always looked forward instead of backwards. With his belief that flower children making pilgrimages to Haight-Ashbury had been brainwashed by media depictions of an LSD-laced counterculture, he sought to avoid nostalgia at all costs. This resulted in his influential trilogy of albums – 1967's *Silver Apples Of The Moon*, 1968's *The Wild Bull*, and 1969's *Touch* – whose spacey barrages of bleeps and whooshes still sound futuristic nearly six decades later.

In his all-black outfits, suspenders and shades, Subotnick cuts a striking figure as an elder statesman of the avant garde. This is emphasised by an interview with Atari Teenage Riot's Alec Empire, who describes Subotnick as a formative influence when they perform together in Berlin. During an interview with David Rosenboom, Subotnick shares his conflicted feelings on composing music for TV themes and advertisements. He returns to the psychic sensation of his arm disappearing when realising it was time to move on from projects, such as his early years as a clarinettist, or a commission from Dream Whip. "My right arm became my Jiminy Cricket," he says. "It told my conscience what I could and couldn't do."

The documentary is cleverly edited, with memorable moments such as a John Wilson-esque cut to a dog lying on the ground when Subotnick describes disappointment. When he moves to New York, a montage of scenes from the city is soundtracked by a song from Lewsberg, Rotterdam's answer to The Velvet Underground. Elsewhere, passages of Subotnick's music are accompanied by liquid light effects by Aidan Fantinatto, bringing the drippy colours of the *Silver Apples Of The Moon* album cover to life.

In the film's closing scene, Subotnick admits to feelings of embarrassment that he has now become the subject of a documentary. Explaining how he helped create the Buchla as an instrument for others to find the sounds in their heads, he sputters, "It's not about me. It's about an idea, a spark!"

Jesse Locke

Morton Subotnick at the Buchla 200, 1976

Composite image of Subotnick recording *Silver Apples Of The Moon*, 1967

Lon Holmberg (Buchla); Aidan Fantinatto/Jules Fischer (*Silver Apples Of The Moon*)

On Location

Festivals, concerts, clubs

Recombinant Festival
Gray Area, San Francisco, US
The Recombinant Festival has historically emphasised the intersection of sound and vision, featuring surround cinema and meaningfully synchronised audiovisual performances. But there's really a third essential item on its semi-annual to-do list: physical sensation, a whole-body experience often taken to the extreme. While "immersive" is the de rigueur term in multimedia events these days (perhaps at this point registering as an empty cliche), during a Recombinant concert the operative term can seem to be "submissive". To attend is to be forewarned.

The festival, which was founded by Naut Humon, has regularly celebrated building-rattling infrasound and hearing-threatening noise, and the final night of the 2023 edition is no exception. The advance publicity doesn't just promise multisensory experience, it's all about the projection of threat, from "Full Frequency Face Melt" to an "exploded Richter scale". To that end, the four scheduled acts this evening explore the places where physical sensation and sound align and, sometimes, collide.

The hosting venue is Gray Area, a converted cinema on San Francisco's Mission Street that still bears the art deco marquee from when it opened, as the Grand, back in 1940. Daniel Menche provides the first of the evening's three solo sets. It says something about the advanced state of modern audio technology that individual musicians from vastly different artistic practices have no difficulty each fully taking over this space and making it their own. Menche amplifies simple noises into weighty symphonic gestures while frozen ripples fill the screen behind him. Voluminous fog horns of doom initiate a seat-shaking effect.

Victoria Shen and Aaron Dilloway are the night's sole duo, and its most circus-like act. Seated at separate noise tables, and switching between handmade bowed instruments and countless little gadgets, they perform initially without even looking toward each other – the scratchy thrumming well-rehearsed and a sufficient form of communication itself. Eventually Shen, wearing denim shorts over fishnet stockings, leaves the stage to march through the audience with a massive, wildly undulating piece of what appears to be metal. She circumnavigates the audience as a domineering spectacle. At another instance, she plays a string that is suspended between her neck and a boot.

After a pause to allow the folding chairs to be reorganised, Olivia Block situates herself at the very centre of the room – much as Rrose did at the 2019 Recombinant, just pre-pandemic. But whereas Rrose's terse techno found her amid a standing audience of adoring fans, for Block the assembled face each other in circles of paired rows. Hers is the evening's most rewarding performance, and not because it is the (relatively) quietest. What matters here is her control over found sounds that circulate fluidly and naturally, as if constituting a temporary autonomous ecosystem.

Kevin Drumm ends the evening – for some attendees prematurely, as the assault gets to the extreme end of extreme. He kicks things off like we're at the rear end of a jet airplane just before take-off, a festoon of white noise. Despite his percussive family name, there are no beats, just a solid block of sound into which one peers in search of patterns. Overtones the size of fire engines plow through the crowd. Some attendees find safe haven in the lobby, or exit the theatre entirely. The majority remain seated, many bobbing their heads to powerfully felt rhythms. Tellingly, no two heads are in sync.
Marc Weidenbaum

Sir Richard Bishop
St Vincent's Chapel, Edinburgh, UK
"Look at you all. You look so beautiful," the Edinburgh based fingerstyle guitarist and songwriter Burnt Paw says softly as an introduction. People in the audience of 150 smile quietly in return in this intimate 1850s church, and the atmosphere, already sanctified with candles, is set for an aptly ritualistic evening.

This sold-out event, put together by DIY underground organisers Braw Gigs and Fuzz Bat, is ostensibly a seldom-seen Edinburgh outing for Sir Richard Bishop, the venerable veteran of Arizona's most definitely out there experimental rock band Sun City Girls. On this second last date of his long European tour that will end two days later in London's Cafe Oto, we get the bonus of a well-thought line-up, supporting Bishop's experimental Americana guitar and impish between-songs banter in sound and spirit.

It helps that Burnt Paw's entertaining hippie raconteur tales, of encounters with bats and gryphons on a late-night quest for a crisp sandwich, provide the mischievous complement to his elemental-themed songs. Sound poetry referencing oceans, foxgloves, stones and goblins, like Walt Whitman time-travelling into Ursula Le Guin's *Earthsea*, accompanies multi-tonal, reverberating layers of intricate guitar-picking. It's not fey, though. The tidal undulation of the vocals alone is full of uncanny melodic sadness.

There are large gongs at the back of the stage, and The Sound Priestess, a certified sound therapist from Glasgow, is sitting among the low light cast by the large frosted crystal sound bowls in front of her, about to go way beyond sound therapy as she builds layers with loops, starting with hushed breath vocals. Hypnotic sounds emerge from the deep like bubbles, slow and sonorous gong and zither strums by hand and violin bow taking us a further step into the otherworldly vibe. The Sound Priestess draws music out of the gongs as her percussion mallet sweeps back and forth, entrancement augmented as her playing casts shadows on the walls against starry blue light projections.

Sir Richard Bishop settles into his chair with an audience now calmly in the zone, ready for his confident unfurling of multicultural riffs and raga rolls, alternately intense and meandering guitar playing, left hand casually whirling, right hand picking his way through musical idioms. He rolls into mandala-like spirals of guitar, trills of notes, down and ups, as near-impossible to keep up with as the guttering tea lights that one of the organisers keeps trying to keep lit. Bishop's back catalogue spans dozens of albums, a whole parallel dimension of global influences and subjects from UFOs to the beat poets, but his set here takes a different path.

There are Sun City Girls avant folk favourites, a gleefully ranting "Horse Cock Phepner", the still visceral politics and punk of "I Deal A Stick" . "This is a song called "Hanging The Preacher". Hope you enjoy it," Bishop drolly quips, as he launches into the wickedly surrealist, missionary-lynching folk tale of "Bitter Cold Countryside", as freshly deranged and vigorous in sound as it was on the *Dante's Disneyland Inferno* album.

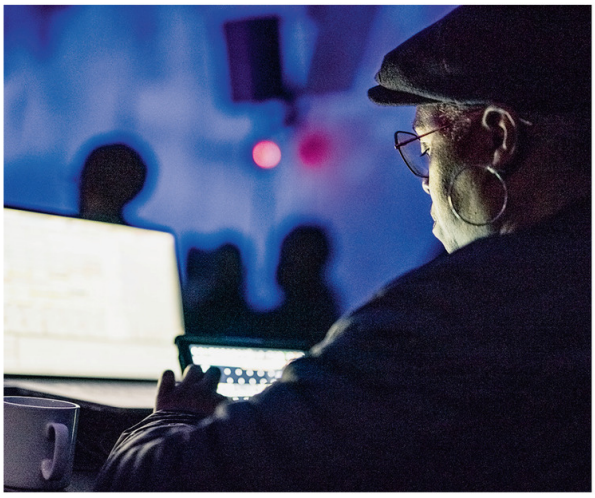
Bishop is far from settling into any kind of dotage. He's still carrying the torch, not just for the mystics, but the unpredictable. The delight is not knowing where he's going to go, but knowing it'll be a dazzling ride. There's a moment when the distorted guitar echoes appear to descend down some woozy musical stairs, and then he balances it somehow, turning it upside down with a twangy tone. It's a deeply satisfying reminder that the road ahead doesn't need to ever be straight.
Katrina Dixon

Week-End Fest
Stadtgarten, Cologne, Germany
What a wonderful festival this is – three nights of acts who you feel haven't been confected and curated together for mere footfall but because the creators of this festival love them, and that love extends to the way the entire three nights I witness are put together. The Stadtgarten contains two venues, a main Konzertsaal and a smaller club called Jaki, and we find ourselves mooching between both.

Down in the heat and intensity of Jaki, two performances stand out. MC Yallah's *Yallah Beibe* album is one of 2023's highlights, and seeing her on the first night spit tracks like "Miniboss" and "Baliwa" in the flesh is an absolute mindbomb. She's simultaneously a fierce and overwhelming presence but also convivial and welcoming into her maelstrom of bass-heavy aggravation and light-speed

Composer, artist and DJ Ain Bailey's music brings listeners together through collective contemplation

By Esi Eshun



Ain Bailey

Black Industrial/Noise Event 4: Ain Bailey
Iklectik, London, UK

During the lively post performance Q&A between electroacoustic composer Ain Bailey and fellow DJ and sound artist Shenece Oretha, Bailey observes that few people seem to listen to music these days without the aid of distraction. Her performance – the fourth in a six-part monthly series entitled Black Industrial/Noise at South London venue Iklectik – duly sees her delivering her set from her laptop at the back of the room, leaving the audience to absorb her music with little to divert their attention but spectral blue and pink lights projected onto the front wall and below the level of the ceiling. The effect, suggestive of a kind of secular church, sees the audience sitting like a mute congregation in solitary and collective contemplation of the music.

The idea of congregation is dear to Bailey – its shared sense of celebration and mourning is here expressed in a richly textured, frequently melodic piece that artfully takes us on a journey into phases of Bailey's work and life. Unfolding in an unhurried and increasingly poignant manner, the performance brings together samples from five of her previous works, including her most recent composition, *The Cavendish: A Tone Poem*, created in September as part of an Arts Science Fellowship at Girton College, Cambridge. Here, the crackles of a physicists' lab are brought together with amplified and distorted orchestral type melodies, bleeps that seem to float from the back of the room, and what sounds like a child's wooden rattle revolving at speed until it breaks glass.

Bailey's source material is difficult to identify, but we are told that another piece, last year's *TRI-OESQUE*, involved a sonic investigation of the vast interior chambers of the Deutzer Brücke bridge in Cologne, its lengthy reverb juxtaposed here with layers of sounds drawn from recordings of Brixton localities intended for the piece *Atlantic Railton*. Disparate traffic and hospital sounds conjure up notions of Black women's labour and sense of displacement, and while such readings might not tally precisely with Bailey's, they nonetheless demonstrate the work's capacity to resonate with listeners' perspectives.

Later in the piece a piano refrain recalls the opening to a well-known Barry White track. Both joyful and loaded with apprehension, it presages the arrival of a remix of Diana Ross's "Love Hangover", dubbed *Untitled Disco Deconstruction*, which, stretched and laid over a dark drone, seems to refer back to Bailey's prominent involvement in London's now defunct Black LGBT+ club culture of the 90s. The sense of loss implied within the music heralds a melancholic turn expressed in laboured breathing, intermittent at first, then more encompassing. This, Bailey reveals, is a segment from her 2018 work *Breath*, created in the aftermath of her mother's passing, the disquieting evocation of the sounds of those final moments and the restraint in her expression of grief making it all the more moving to listen to.

Bailey's music is thoughtful and quietly arresting; exactly how it fits with the theme of Black Industrial/Noise however, is open to question. The series, curated by sound artists Gary Stewart and Trevor Mathison of Dubmorphology alongside curator Oliver Fuke and artist Appau Jnr Boakye-Yiadom, seeks to ask how Black, or more generally, Global Majority experimental, electronic artists, might position themselves within a typically monocultural aesthetic space.

On the evidence of Bailey's performance, the answer might not be immediately evident, but it's one well worth investigating. ●

vocals. Producer and beat-provider Debmaster keeps things seething and sizzling behind his knobs and keys, and by the time "Moss" is caving your head in you don't care how rammed it is so long as you can dance, which you do, lunging with every bass hit, snapping back with every snare shot.

Miraculously even better on the Saturday night are the wonderful Decisive Pink. Again the sound is spot on, the electro pulse thick and satisfying and physical, the one in one out door policy reflecting how many are rammed in Jaki to bear witness to Kate NV and Angel Deradoorian's immaculate sense of show, theatre, play and pop. It's stunning how Decisive Pink have realised their wonderful *Ticket To Fame* LP in a live setting: the detail of the textures hasn't been surrendered at all, but the physicality of the sound has been amped up, and with NV and Deradoorian's performance art delivery you actually apprehend that this is the way to experience Decisive Pink's music, with perhaps a little too much going on for it to be fully comprehended in one night. A duo to obsess over and to follow.

In the main hall, the remarkable Farida Amadou is the first of the weekend's artists, and she beckons us to join in an intense circle around her, her pedals, bass guitar and amp. What she then conjures is miraculous, and almost feels like an onward blessing on the whole weekend. I've never heard a bass used like this, or someone play with such virtuosic implacable rhythm and jazzed out abstraction but also a full-on commitment to noisy unhingement, beats conjured through delay and technique, the strings rapped with a snare-wire, her focus and vision utterly inspirational.

On the same night Lonnie Holley and Mourning [A] BLKstar create an unforgettable swirl of plangent gospel, rasping funk and soul all shot through RA Washington's dubtronic effects. The weekend's highlight, however, is a startlingly beautiful performance by Eddie Chacon – his voice is a miraculous thing of non pushy wonder and his band The Zenmenn create the most sublimely fluid, light-touch grooves you've ever heard this side of a mid-70s Herbie Hancock album. Every single artist here would be happy with a bootleg of what they played. I've never known a stage sound quite so clear, coherent and gorgeous but Chacon and The Zenmenn truly deliver the weekend's most skin-puckering 'I was there' moment.

Neil Kulkarni

Out.Fest
Various Venues, Barreiro, Portugal

It is only in retrospect, as the end of the festival draws near, that I recognise the very first group I saw play at this year's Out. Fest as exemplary of a whole new wave of younger acts in the Lisbon area. The duo of Leonor Arnaut and Ricardo Martins can slip between genres with a supple fluidity, but at the root of their performance is a seemingly intuitive understanding of the diverse idioms

Matt Favero @liminalwarp

of free jazz comparable to the naturalness that previous generations took to punk rock. Much the same can be said of Friday night's openers Farpas, whose set careens wildly and often surprisingly between spidery free improv, hardcore metal and sheer noise; or of alto sax soloist Ravenna Escaleira, whose set in the small auditorium of the local library on Saturday afternoon emerges in short bursts of rapid chromatic runs in a tone at once brittle and highly lyrical, at some moments almost arabesque, other times closer to the post-*Bridge* playing of Sonny Rollins.

It's been eight years since I was last at this festival and in the intervening time its home city of Barreiro, five miles across the Tagus from the Portuguese capital, has seen some changes. In the previous few years alone, house prices have quadrupled. The hotel I was staying in is called Lisbon South, which strikes me as a particularly opportunistic bit of estate agent-ese. People are now doing guided street art tours. But the festival itself remains as vital as ever, a sometimes dizzying mix of experimental rock, jazz, club sounds and composition from throughout Portugal and across the globe, served up in an atmosphere of high conviviality which always puts community first. Pretty much all the venues throughout the weekend are either owned by the local municipality or by one of a remarkable number of small associations and non-profits. Every gig I attend has a full and attentive house and it's not hard to see why, though I doubt there are many post-industrial towns with a 78,000 population that could pull that off with a programme as adventurous as this.

Where else would you get Javanese duo Raja Kirik playing outdoors in the centre of town just as the sun is setting, with children still playing in the park over on one side of the stage and families settling down for dinner in the various restaurants that line the town market on the other? Featuring some punishingly glitchy industrial beats coming from the laptop of composer Yennu Ariendra and accompanied by an array of bewildering self-made instruments from J 'Mo'ong' Santoso Pribady – from a sort of overgrown flute made out of plastic plumbing pipes that sounds like a very angry elephant to a vaguely gamelan-ish set of tuned metal blocks set in a decorative wooden box – they are a brave programming choice as the festival's sole plein air concert, but people seem to dig it (as do I).

Elsewhere, we hear the dreamily diaristic pop ambient of Voice Actor; a somewhat muted but still charged and highly atmospheric collaboration between former Brötzmann and Schlippenbach drummer Sven-Åke Johansson and microhouse pioneer Jan Jelinek, plus a wondrously strange set from smallpipes player Brìghde Chaimbeul that joins the dots between traditional Celtic reels and the electronic minimalism of Catherine Christer Hennix. But most of the weekend's real highlights come at the building of the Associação Desenvolvimento Artes e Oficios on the Friday night.

Last time I was there, in 2015, it looked very much like the derelict former fire station it still was. This time I could recognise a lick of paint and degree of professionalisation, with an incredible new sound system to boot. Playing in the larger back room, Slovenian trio Širom can skronk and hoot with the best of them and when the hurdy-gurdy is going full pelt and fistfuls of mung beans start flying across the stage to smash against drumheads, it gets pretty wild. But for me the magic is in the more tender moments, when the band strip back to just a few sparsely plucked notes from lyre and banjo and the questing, elemental voice of Ana Kravanja.

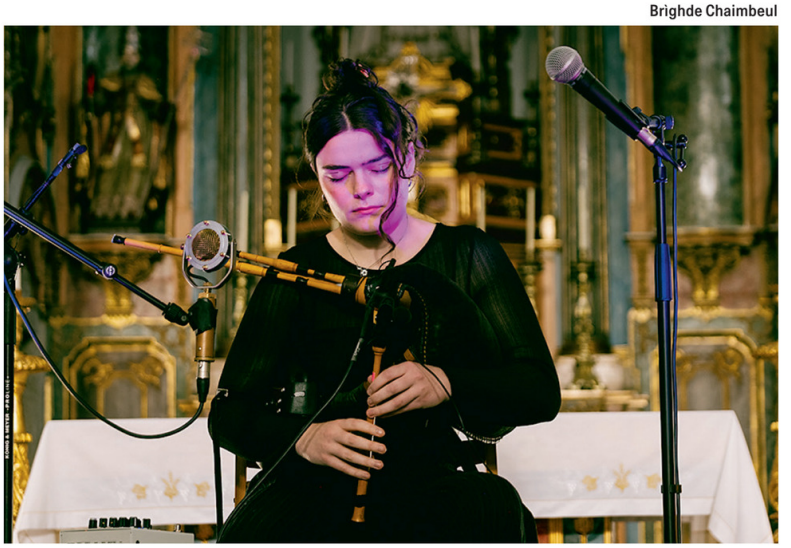
Horse Lords are basically: what if Philip Glass... but a rock band? And yet, despite looking like they could be a gang of ill-fated crooks in a David Lynch film, combined with a studied aversion to anything resembling a stable time signature, these dudes really do rock. They might be the only band at this festival that sound like they only listened to American music, but probably no one else right now is so adept at synthesizing all the best bits from 70 odd years of US avant rock.

I happen to be in the toilets when HiTech start their set, but even from the next room I can feel my chest and earlobes vibrating from the bass in a way that feels borderline dangerous. Back inside, the audience are either fleeing with their fingers in their ears or going hogwild down the front. To the sound of high octane ghettotech beats, MCs King Milo and Milf Melly yell *"I'm a freaky bitch"* and pour whiskey into the open mouths of the audience, leaping into the throng and surfing on outstretched hands.

Before long, a significant portion of the remaining crowd is on stage with the band, leaping and whooping. Stuff is getting broken. The whole thing is almost unbearably intense but utterly thrilling. An unforgettable end to an extraordinary evening.

Robert Barry

Brìghde Chaimbeul



Vera Marmelo

Gonerfest 20
Railgarten, Memphis, US

The drive between the Railgarten in Memphis and my house takes about 21 hours. If you make the drive solo and without a sleep break, it affords a good bit of time for quiet rumination. Flushed with pleasure from the three days of music I'd just been immersed in, I mull over the many excellent underground rock festivals that have gone defunct over the last few years. They are dropping like goddamn flies, but thankfully the folks who run Gonerfest show no signs of losing steam.

Post-pandemic, the festival, once spread across various bars, takes place at a single locale – a large indoor/outdoor space with a stage and several victual options, with various nooks and crannies spread around the site if you need to get out of the hot Memphis sun, or just sit your ass down. Considering the music runs pretty much straight from noon to midnight on Friday and Saturday (with a later start on Thursday and a small coda on Sunday), it's unlikely many people catch every note of every band. But the Gonerfest line-ups are solid enough for it to be hard to decide when to take a break.

This year there are 30-plus artists performing, with seven from Australia, one from Japan, five from Europe, and the rest from various spots around the US. As usual, the headliners (Osees, Gories and Mummies) are all veterans of previous Gonerfests, and they splooge out great variations on garage punk invention. Over the years, the San Francisco based Osees' sound has mutated into something midway between Flaming Lips and Bardo Pond. But Detroit's Gories and San Bruno, California's Mummies both know how to deliver raw goods – stripped down, sharp-edged takes on 1960s raunch epistemology (either with or without gauze bandaging).

But the real revelatory moments lie elsewhere. This is always a chance to see a lot of bands live that I only know through records, and the booking this year is a fine display of the festival's expanding stylistic width. It's been almost 50 years since The Droogs and Distorted Levels began reviving the garage rock ethos, and an endless variety of branches have split off from the main trunk since then. Many bands play great sets within the expected confines. The France based Jack Of Heart blast out raw fast chunks of pop-shaped punk nuggetry. Bisbee Arizona's Exbats serve up solid garage readymades with girl group

and Everly Brothers overtones. Belgium's venerable first-gen punks The Kids play a set of classics, highlighting tracks from their 1977 debut album and a cover of Wire's "12XU". But that's far from all there is.

The gulf between the Coloured Balls-damaged boogie-crush of Sydney's superb COFFIN and the third LP Velvets' swirl of Rotterdam's exceptional Lewsberg would seem unbridgable, but both bands are rapturously received by the punters. And while I have to admit this year's 'curveball entry' – the Bill Orcutt/Chris Corsano duo – are not everyone's cup of meat, there are a couple hundred people who dig the clangour deeply while those less enamoured take the opportunity to grab some tacos. And most agree it is very damn cool they were invited.

Especially with the demise of gatherings like Cropped Out and Ponderosa Stomp, Goner Fest is becoming ever more essential for those who want a jolt of live power. Rock music may be dead or dying or whatever. But for one weekend a year in Memphis, it's possible to believe that ain't so.

Byron Coley

Sonica Surge
Tramway, Glasgow, UK

Cryptic, the curators of Sonica Surge, have been working tirelessly for years, sponsoring challenging artist commissions and managing the Glasgow based festival of experimental music. And they sure know how to get a party started: opening is Robert Henke's CBM 8032 AV. One of the designers of Ableton, the software that has opened up electronic music production to millions, has scored a whole concert and AV spectacle for a set of 1980 Commodore computers. What could be a retro curio is a set of hooky minimal techno that's hard to stay seated for, in front of giant screens crawling with phosphor green flashing characters that could melt your face off. The following day he gives a lecture explaining how the constraints of the Commodores' processing power force him to think more creatively about building sounds, and how the limitations of near random number generators can be manipulated to create visuals with an optimal blend of chaos and pattern repetition.

I feel a bit bad for Lucy Duncombe and Feronia Wennborg, following that up with a wispy, pixelated piece playing on vocal manipulation. But Sonia Killman's *Digital Skies* is a cool and measured work about light pollution: a screen of blue fades to lilac, accompanied by images of streets blasted by lamps and industrial haze, and a score of saxophone solos battling chthonic waves of synthesizer arpeggiation. Finally, sound artist Samm Anga's *Waxen Figures*, with visuals by Veronica Petukhov, puts a new spin on hauntology with its underworld journey through folk magic, deep bass and chanting, and ritual dance and dead languages, inspired by Scotland's Covesea Caves and the Munlochy Clootie Well.

The following day, KMRU (Nairobi born sound artist Joseph Kamaru) performs *As Nature,* a set inspired by systems of electromagnetic signals and unseen feedback between species of birds and insects. Unfortunately, I miss the start as there is a no late entry policy, but what I hear through the closed doors of the auditorium is lovely, something akin to Bowie's "Moss Garden", with some crackling, alien undertones. Tatsuru Arai follows, with a real heartbreaker of a set: his *Re-solarization* presents lush, colour-saturated images of flowers that blossom and decay into sprays of pixelated dust, to a score of overblown, high romantic classics. For a field of composition that can often skew cerebral, Arai's work is absolutely sensual – some of his flowers make Mapplethorpe's look modest – and its score swells between swells of emotion and nausea. As his flowers are pulverised again and again, the work feels like a memento mori, a riposte to the streamlined bloodlessness of other algorithms.

SCANAUDIENCE by SCHNITT and Gianluca Sibaldi follows. A beam of light scans the audience and projects their image on a screen, as the three musicians on stage zoom in and out of the resulting images, sift data points from them and create glitchy responses of blips and oscillations. Over time, the surveillance effect becomes more familiar, and audience members start mugging for the camera, even as the images on screen become more distorted. Meanwhile, the visuals suggest increased levels of manipulation of the data gathered – what is being measured, and what for? And why is everyone so comfortable with the whole thing?

The final programme opens with a strange and meditative project by Raydale Dower, as Yoga Fanzine, inspired by minimalist composition: he thumps concrete objects across the stage floor to the sound of wavering chimes; projections are geometric figures and shadows of plant fronds switched to the crunch of a slide carousel. It's like he's living in a shoebox diorama or a Beckett play.

Closing is a set of lo-fi, robot based techno by Moritz Simon Geist that gets some late night dancing going. However, in between, Glasgow based Zimbabwean rapper and singer EYVE is the highlight, dressed in high femme fripperies, enthusiastically dancing in a pair of light-up fairy wings as she unleashes her smiley yet powerful rapid-fire flow about feminism and mental health. Even her diss track manages to be both cutting and utterly charming. Veronica Petukhov responds with backdrops sitting somewhere between glitch and glitz: both offering a welcome jolt of fizzy energy.

Emily Bick

People Like Us
Cafe Oto, London, UK

Audiovisual collagist People Like Us/Vicki Bennett's riotous three day residency at Cafe Oto feels like a plunge into the carnivalesque, her collection of guest artist friends helping to deliver a high octane, deceptively impromptu melange of live crooning, vintage Hollywood cinema, improvised karaoke and ironic performance lectures whose apparent absurdity simply affirms the seriousness of Bennett's intent.

That intent is signalled in the main event of the residency, a half hour world preview, presented on the second night, of Bennett's

Porest

crowdfunded new film *The Library Of Babel* – a meticulously composed and choreographed collage of material sourced from old and newer Hollywood and British films. Still a work in progress, the film, named after a Jorge Luis Borges short story, begins with doors opening in sequence like portals to other dimensions, while a variety of characters risk escaping their fictional confines for potentially threatening alternate realities. Throughout, Bennett relays the score live from her laptop – juxtaposing romantic 1930s standards with staccato stabs and discordant drones. And if the music doesn't always gel seamlessly with the visuals, there are still plenty of stunning sequences, in a film which comes over as an encapsulation of core aspects of Bennett's philosophy.

A practising Buddhist who considers collage and sampling to be forms of contemporary folk culture, Bennett has been recontextualising music and then film since 1991, her numerous albums and videos – largely available on UbuWeb – underpinned by a notion that the interconnectedness of creative activity precludes claims to originality and ownership.

Aspects of that conviction surface in the multiply reflective nature of the proceedings, held together with avuncular charm by artist Hearty White, Bennett's fellow DJ on New York/Jersey City radio station WFMU. White's vaudevillian style is amply matched by the evening's first main act, fellow Kentuckian Irene Moon, the pseudonym for entomologist Dr Katja Seltmann, whose 30 year career as academic and artist is showcased here with a part sung audiovisual lecture, complete with a Pythonesque animation about bees.

There is a knowingly DIY veneer to the work that's readily eclipsed by Bennett's screening of an as yet untitled, gorgeously kaleidoscopic film whose ominously upbeat and pastiche laden songs she performs in a trio – in only their second outing – with musician friends Ergo Phizmiz and Gwilly Edmondez. Despite their brio, it is the night's final act, veteran performer Maggie Nicols, who imbues proceedings with a timely gravitas. Poised at the piano, Nicols sings a stirring collection of newly penned and older jazz/folk songs that morph into a bracing denunciation of the Israel/Gaza war.

Photo courtesy People Like Us

Intimations of the conflict also appear in the second evening's opening act, London based US artist Porest. Deploying the same smug 1950s media voice as White, he delivers a satirical Zoom based performance that sees him inviting the audience, with faux earnestness, to assist him in psychically assassinating centenarian statesman Henry Kissinger. Later, a different sort of absurdity comes courtesy of the multitalented Phizmiz, who, accompanying himself on banjo and piano, sings wittily dark fables before moving on to disquieting songs about silent film stars in a style reminiscent of Kurt Weil.

While the final day starts with an informative conversation between Bennett and White, it is Swedish artist Erik Bünger, delivering his extraordinary 2010 performance lecture *The Third Man*, who steals the show. Inspired by the familiar melody from Carol Reed's titular film, he spins multiple dazzling associations, with the highlight arguably being his analysis of *The Sound Of Music* as a technology of psychic, social and sonic domination. Perhaps the same desire to both celebrate and critique popular music informs the residency's final act, the karaoke session Chart Sweep, which finds Bennett selecting snippets of 80s number ones and Edmondez performing them with deliberately strained amateurism. And if the session skates close to indulgence, it also acquires a cumulative intensity that helps transform Cafe Oto into the set of a joyous, occasionally perturbing, and manifestly thought provoking house party.

Esi Eshun

Loraine James
Thee Parkside, San Francisco, US

Loraine James is a control freak. That is, she's a MIDI controller freak. The devices take up a substantial portion of a single piece of luggage wheeled, the first Friday of October, into the courtyard at Thee Parkside, a small club in a quiet stretch of San Francisco's Potrero Hill neighbourhood. James hangs for a spell by her merch table while the solo musician Flung (aka Citrus City Records artist Kashika Kollaikal from across the bay in Oakland) plays a fine set of emotionally raw avant pop, confessional alto intoning amid seesawing synth lines and scattered beats.

From James's unpacked valise come close to a half dozen devices, each laid side by side on a table at the edge of the stage. Not a single one of the MIDI gadgets, including a tiny piano-style keyboard, is actually capable of making a sound. However, each provides her with myriad definable controls over the Ableton session she has preloaded on her laptop – the one emblazoned with an oversized sticker that reads "glitch bitch" in an appropriately frazzled font. That is the title of the indelible track that opened her breakthrough 2019 album *For You And I*, and that received a sequel, "Glitch The System (Glitch Bitch 2)", on *Gentle Confrontation*, which came out a few weeks prior to tonight's show.

Tellingly, there is no microphone. This is a club show – not so much a concert as a summons to dance. There will be no break between tracks, no division between songs. She will perform an act of auto-assemblage, stitching stems of her own tracks together, blurring the lines – well, glitching them – where one song ends and the next begins.

The show starts with an extended reworking of *Gentle Confrontation*'s "2003", its opening instrumental sequence expanded at length into something downright elated, though she eventually slows it down, the pitch intentionally sagging. Not long after comes the crowd-pleasing "Glitch Bitch", its main verse locked in tight – a mumbled phrase reduced to shards of syllables in infernal repetition, a playful tweak that never fails to induce a hypnotic state.

Tonight marks James's first ever show in San Francisco. It is the penultimate night of a short North American tour that hits eight cities between the US and Canada. The house is packed, and the fog machine could easily function in a space several times as large. James's concentration is palpable – she doesn't miss a beat, even when a projector and accompanying laptop fall to the ground due to an overeager dancer and have to be rebooted into service. It's ironic to witness technology fail at a show that enthusiastically explores what music sounds like when it is falling apart, as during an especially vivid vivisection of the wonderfully titled "I DM U", which sounds a bit like Squarepusher covering LTJ Bukem.

James doesn't merely resequence the segments of her best tracks, she makes a calisthenic performance of juggling them, letting small bits play out and tweaking them, sometimes mercilessly. Not only does the night's nonstop workout entice the crowd to sweat, it also reinforces just how self-contained her original compositions are. While all the sounds this evening originated on her solo albums, the show doesn't resemble any of them – it's more single-minded, more emphatic.

Perhaps someday James will release an Autechre-style live album, so that fans can experience her self-dissection from the comfort of their own earbuds.

Marc Weidenbaum

Usurper: That's That Then
Summerhall, Edinburgh, UK

On 1 April, Usurper sent a mailout to their fans announcing their final show in October. A classic April Fool's prank from the Eric and Ernie of Edinburgh's improv noise scene, right? Wrong. Ali Robertson and Malcy Duff really are putting their double act of skronk, slapstick and sound poetry into retirement. For tonight's farewell gig, 19 years and 364 days after the friends began performing as Usurper, typically, the pair graciously share the limelight with "the best noughties noise bands in Edinburgh".

Following the retirement theme, Robertson and Duff are guided, wobbling, onstage by their wives. The duo wear cartoon bug eyes masks that they swelter underneath for a good hour, blindly facing one another as friends perform in front of them. Saxophonist/performance artist Joyce Whitchurch (Sue Fitzpatrick, half of Acrid Lactations) presents her "non eulogy" to Usurper. Sending up the tropes of a tribute through sublimely absurdist smuggery, rewound snippets of dialogue from the 1980s film *Tootsie* and a vocalised sax impression (her sax malfunctioned at the last minute, she explains, eyes closed, straining a smile), she lets slip her clear affection and nostalgia for these goons that she has performed alongside, bought zines and comics from, grown up with. Although Whitchurch protests that tonight isn't a look back on a shared history, it very much is.

Assembled is a roomful of people who've been going to the same gigs for decades, thanks in no small part to the scene creating antics of the Brothers Usurper (not actual brothers). Rampant collaborators who have drawn fans of DIY weird stuff into pubs and art galleries around the UK, Europe and America, Usurper have also performed at Tusk, Instal, Tectonics, Counterflows and Colour Out Of Space. Most of those festival organisers are in the crowd and Colour Out Of Space curators Karen Constance and Dylan Nyoukis of Chocolate Monk are tremendous guest DJs.

It would be a love-in if Usurper went for that kind of thing, but instead we get a fondly chaotic flipchart gameshow of legendary Edinburgh noise bands after discordant loud blasts and parps from free improv sax and electronic duo Tindegger, aka Tina Krekels (Fua) and Grant Smith (Fordell Research Unit, Muscletusk). When Usurper lift their masks for their last preposterous, gloriously wonky performance, like two gurning Toby Jugs leaning over a table of charity shop tat and strange objects, they bat insults back and forth, draw farcical sounds from egg slices, bells, ping pong balls and hair rollers. Robertson gets a laugh when he sheepishly announces to his longterm musical partner, "Malcy, I've been seeing other improvisors." With Duff's young daughter Sissy passing through the crowd selling the new Usurper album, it's a gonzo family affair.

There is nothing tongue in cheek about Robertson and Duff's bromantic hug at the end of the set, and it's extremely tough not to suddenly discover something in our collective eyes as Mama Cass warbles loudly over the speakers that, *"you gotta make your own kind of music"*. Wearing a Wonder Woman apron and Lidl bumbag, Duff and Robertson hand out plectrums to the audience bearing the words, "you are Beryl Morag", a nod to Usurper's imaginary third member, invoked at previous gigs. Beryl will live on and shall find several spin off projects – both members perform with Sonic Bothy Learning Space, and Robertson will remain busy curating shows, running his Giant Tank label and improvising with artists other than Duff, such is his hopeless devotion to DIY. That's that then for Usurper but long live their luddite, lowbrow legacy.

Claire Sawers

Easter Margins Road 2 Redline Tour with OverMyBody
FINAL, Taipei, Taiwan

FINAL – the destination for tonight – is smack between two subway lines, Zhongxiao Fuxing and Da'an stations flanking what during the day is a business district filled with high rises and crisscrossed by bustling thoroughfares. But at night, the storefronts are shuttered, and the Chinese characters above the club's

entrance merely mark out the building's name. It's easy to pick out first-timers by how they double-check their phones to make sure they're at the right spot. The only people on the street – twenty- to thirtysomethings sporting vaguely dark and grungy streetwear – are presumably here for the party, shuttling between the club and the convenience store next door to replenish themselves with food and drink.

The party in question is the penultimate leg of the Eastern Margins Road 2 Redline tour, as the UK based electronic music collective bring LVRA and Jex Wang to represent the crew before they head off to Hangzhou tomorrow to link up with the Function Lab crew. In the last month they've played 12 cities in China, Japan and South Korea, their whirlwind of activity spurred by China's recent post-Covid reopening. But when I descend into the club, bracing for the lingering cigarette smoke from past parties, local experimental club label OverMyBody is warming up the floor.

On the decks is up and coming producer Sandy's Trace – whose recent track "Beholden" was a highlight of the recent *FINAL Taipei Compilation* on Tzusing's Sea Cucumber imprint, all syncopated spitfire and bass. His set mines more of the same hard-edged bass from UK producers like DJ MM and Klahrk, but towards the end some of that darkness melts into the airy vocals of Seoul rapper 106mido. DJ HaiLongWang takes over, mixing a potpourri of Western regional genres with a dash of taike tackiness: DC's Black Rave Culture alongside a Jay Chou jungle edit, S Murk's "Put 'Em Up" into pre-debut C-pop darlings babyMINT.

Chinese-Scottish singer and producer LVRA is the main character for the night, and perhaps the tour overall, performing at every stop of their 15 show extravaganza. The pitch-dark concrete cube in which we're dancing fills up as LVRA steps behind the booth. Her latest record, soft like steel, takes up a large chunk of her modest discography, which she seems to be playing in full. Opting to perform the more club-forward remixes of some of her songs, her sound recalls SOPHIE's ferrofluid sonics but lays it thicker on the rhythmics. Welsh producer Aloka's flip of "welcome" brings a bit of weighty UK flavour, while Jensen Interceptor's blistering take on "soft like steel" sees LVRA jump on top of the DJ booth. Were there more people, a stage dive wouldn't have been out of the question.

Jex Wang is next, their new-school jungle selections – Sully, Special Request, Tim Reaper and Samurai Breaks – boiling things over with splattery, timestretched snares. Rather than playing tracks from Eastern Margins's roster, they opt to go all out on the "redline" spirit. What this means is ending with a cheeky hardcore remix of The Veronicas' "Untouched", the triumphant strings crisp and full through the club's Funktion-One system. It's a hard act for local club experimentalist Ao Wu to follow, yet he reads the vibe and cues up what sounds like a vogue edit of "ETA", sped up to oblivion to match Jex Wang's closing track. It only makes sense – in the post-Korean wave global club circuit, all roads lead to the girl group NewJeans.

James Gui

Die Hochstapler

Donaueschinger Musiktage 2023
Various venues, Donaueschingen, Germany

Donaueschinger Musiktage was launched in 1921 and is widely considered to be the oldest contemporary music festival in the world. Its focal point has always been the premiere of new orchestral work, long performed by The SWR Symphony Orchestra, the house ensemble of the public radio network that funds much of the festival's commissions. For the first time in its history this year's edition was programmed by a woman, new artistic director Lydia Rilling, who made shifting the gender balance toward female-identifying artists a primary focus, much to the vocal chagrin of some concert goers. According to multiple sources, one attendee stormed out of a concert after noting there were too many women on stage, so clearly Rilling has her work cut out for her.

70 per cent of the featured composers in 2023 are female or non-binary, including all four composers featured on the big opening night orchestral performance. Rilling has taken risks well beyond gender representation, and some of the music seems to have even challenged SWR Symphony Orchestra, who also have to contend with the less than ideal acoustics of the giant gymnasium where they perform each year. Its account of Matana Roberts's *Elegy for Tyre: "Welcome To The World Through My Eyes..."*, however, lacks the sort of heavily improvised rigour at the heart of the composer's own work, with the orchestra seeming unable or unwilling to produce textures beyond the score.

Roberts wrote the piece in remembrance of Tyre Deandre Nichols, one of an endless string of unarmed Black people killed by police in the US. Roberts asked the orchestra members to "say their names", a campaign to draw attention to pervasive racial injustice, but their articulation of Tyre's name feels tepid enough to be apologetic.

Clara Iannotta's *where the dark earth bends* is a dynamic sonic exploration that wrings great timbral variety from the orchestra, a kind of concerto for the psychoacoustic magicians of Rage Thormbones (Weston Olencki and Mattie Barbier), beautifully complemented by curdled electronics and elusive orchestral swells and rumbles. Longtime Éliane Radigue cohort and clarinettist Carol Robinson is given the unenviable task of working with the orchestra for a new piece in the composer's stunning *Occam Océan* series, *Cinquanta*, but whatever gripping acoustic phenomenon is percolating within the monolithic block of sound, I can't sense it, although I can't say if this is due to muddy sound or a lack of commitment from the players.

1979 by British composer Joanna Bailie delivers a moving meditation on memory, masterfully articulated by Belgium's Ictus Ensemble. Chamber writing of rare elegance and highly effective reduction fuses with electronics and heavily processed fragments of pop tunes from the titular year. The group's eight musicians are split apart, each half stationed in the front corners of the space, with the arrangements masterfully bifurcated in such a way that the half of the ensemble on the right side of the space pick up what the left hand grouping is doing. That subtle latency combined with deliberately hazy video projects of a handful of largely static everyday scenes, reinforces how imperfect memories constantly reshape our experiences.

New York's Yarn/Wire deliver two dramatically different programmes, the best of which feature three disparate commissions from trumpeter Peter Evans, saxophonist Ingrid Laubrock and percussionist Tyshawn Sorey. All three musicians join the ensemble, with Sorey playing celeste, presenting compositional visions. The jazz portion of the programme is given to Die Hochstapler, a magnificent French-Italian-German quartet specialising in a kind of post-Tristan Honsinger spontaneity that exercises a different muscle with a highly entertaining, razor-sharp sort of radio play featuring guest vocalists Mat Pogo and Cristina Vetrone and sound artist Antje Vowinckel.

Despite the festival's focus on orchestral music, the best performances here are these, for smaller ensembles.

Peter Margasak

SWR/Astrid Karger

On Site

Exhibitions, installations, etc

Val Wilmer
Blue Moments, Black Sounds
Worldly Wicked & Wise, London, UK
This is Val Wilmer's first solo exhibition since 1996. Little wonder, then, that the small Worldly Wicked & Wise Gallery is packed on opening night despite the London damp. Inside the steamy room lined with photographs, Wilmer, author of the celebrated *As Serious As Your Life*, is signing copies of her new book, *Deep Blues 1960–1988*. The latter pictures blues players at home and on stage from Mississippi to Croydon – a slice of what's up on the walls.

The smallest photograph on display has a big story behind it. Louis Armstrong is smiling at the camera, handkerchief in hand, while an excited schoolboy exits stage left. Wilmer took the photo at London Airport in 1956 when she was 14, using her mother's Box Brownie (the schoolboy is her little brother). Armstrong had performed at Earl's Court the night before on what Wilmer remembers as a revolving stage, and was about to fly to Ghana to play at the independence celebrations marking the end of colonial rule.

This was a historic crossroads, of course, but it was also a crossroads in Wilmer's life. Soon she was paying close attention to the photographic work of Ida Kar, Henri Cartier-Bresson and Wayne Miller. And it would only be a couple of years before she began knocking on dressing room doors in London's West End, photographing and interviewing some of the biggest names in the history of Black music.

Wilmer was close with many of the music's biggest stars, but she also befriended and photographed blues people who couldn't have cared less about fame. On her trips to the American South in search of the roots of jazz and blues, she sought to capture the "life-affirming quality" that she felt set these musics apart – a vital quality that can be seen in the stance and expression of tractor driver Jacob Stuckey, pictured dancing to the sound of Jack Owen's guitar in a clapboard house in a Mississippi field in 1972. These 'blue moments' are the music's everyday aspect.

And when it comes to the stars, Wilmer's photos don't always show them on stage. Instead we get: Archie Shepp reflecting in a backroom surrounded by portraits of Hendrix and Tommie Smith; Johnny Griffin grinning as pigeons try to land on his hat in Trafalgar Square; Muddy Waters playing cards in Croydon; Coltrane radiating calm backstage in London in 1961 (Wilmer was 19); Anthony Braxton and Ornette Coleman shooting pool in the latter's loft. Each photo on display (a mixture of original silver gelatin and digital prints) is a story in and of itself, but together they form both an intimate diagram of postwar Black music and, less obviously, personal points on the compass of Wilmer's life.

From Streatham to Harlem, from the West End to the East Village, the writer and photographer tried to represent what Archie Shepp called "the triumph of the human spirit" in all its beautiful mundanity (there's Dexter Gordon, the Sophisticated Giant, getting his shoes shined in Piccadilly Circus). These photos tell of music that's as serious as your life, life being simultaneously as serious and as smiling as the sound of Ornette Coleman's saxophone.

Gabriel Bristow

Meredith Monk
Calling
Haus der Kunst, Munich, Germany
At the entrance to Munich's Haus der Kunst the ululating voice of Meredith Monk sounds out, bathing the art gallery's stone facade in lullaby, unspooling into the street and calling to the surfers on the Eisbach river in Englischer Garten park. "Take your time to listen to her voice," advises Dr Andrea Lissoni, artistic director of the Haus der Kunst – and you will need plenty to fully explore the six decades of work in Calling.

Known for her extended vocal technique, Monk's multidisciplinary and site-specific achievements are highlighted in this new exhibition arranged in three chapters: Archive Dream Room; Time Capsules and Shrines And Other Offerings. Her immersive installations particularly chime with the other major exhibition running concurrently at Haus der Kunst – Inside Other Spaces: Environments By Women Artists 1956–1976 – and Lissoni is keen to create a dialogue between the two. For Monk, a practising Buddhist with Jewish lineage who believes in the healing power of art and the magic of transformation, Haus der Kunst must seem the perfect example: a gallery built in 1937 to house Nazi-sanctioned paintings and sculptures, since reborn to champion adventurous contemporary artists, especially female ones.

The visitor's journey begins with an invitation to ascend a staircase to the upper floor – a projection of impermanence portraits

Johnny Griffin by Val Wilmer (1964)

Meredith Monk, *Songs Of Ascension Shrine* (2023)

Val Wilmer (Griffin); Fritz Beck/Haus der Kunst (Monk)

Installation view of Barbara Ess: Archives at White Columns

and a kaleidoscopic *Hand Mandala* pattern the way, while bell pulleys dangle and a ghostly keening fills the stairwell. At the top, you turn left into the capacious Archive Dream Room. In contrast to the other two zones, this is brightly lit, with Monk's process documented in map drawings, movement notations, durational vocal charts, scores, films, props, mood boards, dreams captured in watercolours, and more. Arranged in groups alongside furniture from her New York loft apartment, the material is a vast compendium of process, like hefty sleevenotes for a gargantuan box set. For the uninitiated, the quantity is daunting.

Acclaimed for her reinvention of operatic form, Monk's *Atlas* (1991) features among the first exhibits. "A foundational aspect was not using actual words," explains her producer Peter Sciscioli, "which was one way to open the form up to anyone, regardless of language." Another advantage was the extended rehearsal period. "It created a much richer and communal aspect to the overall production that was very palpable."

I ask him how the musician-composer maintains her voice at the age of 81. "She practises every day," says Sciscioli. "She works with a vocal coach, Jeanie LoVetri, and she follows physical routines like Pilates, eating well, trying to rest."

Travel and migration are leitmotifs that repeat throughout. Three white suitcases 'sing' when their lids are opened and a row of Monk's performance shoes form a timeline in footwear. For 40 years, she kept a pet tortoise, an emblem of slow time. "I like the reminder of a more ancient time or timelessness," she has said. In *Turtle Dreams*, shown on an old TV set, a tortoise crawls across a miniature post-apocalyptic cityscape. The film is intercut with footage of two pairs of dancers who step-sway towards and away from each other like a slowed down version of a Newton's Cradle.

The dark and internal Time Capsules room comprises curtained chambers with reconstructions of Monk's multidisciplinary site-specific works – *16 Millimeter Earrings*, *Juice*, *Quarry* and *Ellis Island*, each a complex motherboard of connecting elements. The opera *Quarry* is a poetic meditation on war and fascism with action sounds (radio static, bicycle bells) and props that include a child's patchwork blanket and collection of suitcases – these are overshadowed by ominously weighty boulder-like clouds and war planes. "It's very relevant to what's going on now," Monk said in 2017. "You know, these cycles of fascist impulse. Where does it come from? Why does that come up at certain times?"

I ask if Monk has ever wanted to articulate a sound that her voice is unable to achieve. "It's less about her saying, 'I want it to sound like this thing over there…' and more a case of coming from the body, through the body," explains Sciscioli. In *Quarry*, the wordlessness is not only primal but magnifies the horror, for what words can describe a genocide?

As if to serve as an antidote to global troubles, the final chapter, Shrines And Other Offerings, brings the visitor to rest in more secluded shelters – to silver chairs inside a ring of small rocks, where headphones are supplied to listen to campfire babble from long ago (*Silver Lake With Dolmen Music*) or to watch spellbound by the hypnotic video triptych *Songs Of Ascension Shrine*, where Monk's vocal ensemble and musicians perform on a spiralling double helix staircase that descends to a pool of black water. Here, a piper stands and plays, sending his musical breath back up the staircase, a neverending cycle of giving and receiving.

Deborah Nash

Barbara Ess
Archives
White Columns, New York, US

A confrontational question greets visitors to the Barbara Ess retrospective at White Columns gallery on the northwestern edge of Manhattan's West Village. "Have You Ever Experienced Ecstasy?" is printed in faint grey across an entrance wall outside the exhibition space. It seems to waver between challenge and jealous curiosity. Is the referenced euphoric state religious or sexual or drug-induced? And perhaps more significantly, is the question posed to seek commonality or information about the experience? We can answer the question, but we'll still know nothing about the person asking. Did Barbara Ess, a cultivator of the no wave visual and musical aesthetic, ever experience ecstasy?

The phrase is taken from a black and white photograph of an infant, presumably the girl then called Barbara Eileen Schwartz, also on display in the entryway. She's being held by a woman, presumably her mother, the upper half of whose head lies outside the frame. All attention is on the baby, happy, full of promise, a lifetime ahead of accomplishment, disappointment, depression, rejection, love and, perhaps, ecstasy.

Ess was born in Brooklyn in 1944 and succumbed to cancer at her home, north of the city, 76 years later. She found her realm of expression in New York City's Downtown of the 1970s, performing with a succession of no wave bands including Y Pants, The Static and Ultra Vulva. Known at least as well for her photography as her music, she championed pinhole cameras and had old Brownies and cheap Soviet models in her collection. Her unapologetically confessional work included setting up a video feed from her Lower Manhattan apartment to a monitor on the street so passersby could see whatever might be happening upstairs.

She was the longtime partner of the better remembered Glenn Branca, and was, by her own implication, "just another asshole". But she was also a committed artist, pursuing a DIY attitude over aptitude aesthetic through music, prose, photography and performance. She had three retrospective shows during her lifetime, and exhibited her work alongside Richard Prince and Cindy Sherman, but she was already teetering at the edge of art world consciousness. The show at White Columns – a gallery with which she often collaborated – seeks to restore her art world profile.

The show itself is necessarily voyeuristic, even if we can assume her permission for everything on display. It's limited to what might be called her professional work; the hundreds of diaries in the archive, for example, weren't on display. Still, it feels more personal than the poised revelations of Tracey Emin. The show pulls from the breadth of Ess's work while displaying only a fraction of the archive. Displayed alongside her photographs are typewritten and hand-edited manuscript pages, including a reading list for the class she taught at Bard College and a summary of her life in single line entries, beginning with "Burning leaves with grandfather" and ending with "I quit waitressing and learn typesetting". There are gig flyers, copies of her records and editions of *Just Another Asshole*, the mixed media zine she launched in 1978.

What is most striking about the show is the singularity of her aesthetic. The zine – in its policy of publishing all submissions and even in its name – rejected art world celebrity. The homemade pinhole cameras she worked with were a perfect corollary to the primal immediacy of no wave; without filters or even lens settings, what she saw was, literally, what she got. Her pinhole photos were collected in the book *I Am Not This Body*, published in 2001. Barbara Ess: Archives serves as a testimony that anyone's expression might be seen as art, but even more so that Barbara Ess embraced all experience as a personal work of art.

Kurt Gottschalk

Courtesy White Columns

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Ash Fure Animal • **David Virelles** • **Fred Frith** (Solo) • **Kassa Overall** • **JJJJJerome Ellis** • **JG Thirlwell** + Ensemble
Kokoroko • **Ka Baird** • **Henry Threadgill** Make a Move • **Son Rompe Pera** • **Leyla McCalla** • **Bitchin Bajas**

Blacktronika Presents: Future Funk • Brandon Coleman • Charlie Dark MBE • Dibia$e • Computer Jay

Jon Batiste • **Silk Road Ensemble** with **Rhiannon Giddens** **Sunday** March 24
Henry Threadgill with **Vijay Iyer & Dafnis Prieto** • **Julian Lage** & the Speak to Me Band
John Medeski / Joe Russo / Marc Ribot • **Edgar Meyer** • **Aoife O'Donovan** • **Harvest Time** A Tribute to Pharoah Sanders
Fatoumata Diawara • **billy woods** • **Samora Pinderhughes** • **Cyro Baptista** Chama • **flysiifu** • **Davóne Tines** • **Laugh Ash**
Evan Lurie Quintet with Bandoneon • **Nadah El Shazly** • **Void Patrol** • **Finom** • **Min Xiao-Fen** with River Guerguerian
Sofia Rei & Jorge Roeder • **Aleuchatistas** • **Knoxville Symphony Chamber Orchestra** • **Henry Threadgill** Air • **Tomas Fujiwara** 7 Poets Trio

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33EMYBW & Joey Holder
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Cole Pulice
Cello Octet Amsterdam & Nick Verstand
goat *(jp)*
Gazelle Twin
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Iceboy Violet
Jenny Hval
'I Want To Be A Machine'
Laura Ortman
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Maria W Horn & Sara Parkman
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Maya Al Khaldi & Sarouna
Niecy Blues
Nick León & Ezra Miller
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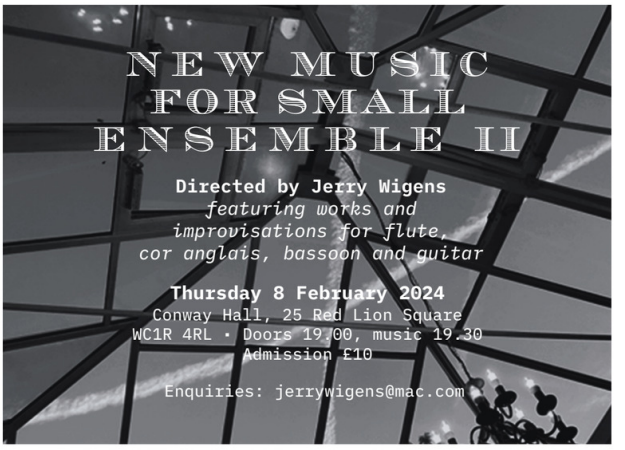

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THE ANATOMY OF THE ORCHESTRA: DRONE REFRACTIONS

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Walk amongst a 34-piece orchestra as they chart an immersive odyssey through drone: Paraorchestra and Charles Hazlewood perform work by minimalist greats Pauline Oliveros and Arvo Pärt plus a brand new composition by Rylan Gleave inspired by John Cage. A unique opportunity to be on the inside looking out, rather than the outside looking in.

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Out There

UK festivals

Bath Jazz Weekend
The west country starts the year with this jazz and improvised music weekender. Featuring Maggie Nicols & Julie Tippetts, Larry Stabbins & Alexander Hawkins, Claude Deppa's Middle Eye, Sophia Domancich/Paul Dunmall Quartet, François Corneloup & Tony Hymas, and more. Plus a screening of Louis Malle's 1958 film *Ascenseur Pour L'Échafaud* which has a soundtrack by Miles Davis. £85–£28, bathjazzweekend.com

Electric Spring
Four days of electronic music with experimental short films, creative coding symposium and artists Nakul Krishnamurthy & Luke Fowler. Huddersfield University, 14–17 February, free, electricspring.co.uk

Rockaway Beach
Three days of live music at a Butlins holiday camp. With Sleaford Mods, Bob Vylan, The Nightingales, M(h)aol, The Selecter, Trupa Trupa, The Unit Ama, and more. Bognor Regis Butlins, 5–7 January, various prices, rockawaybeach.co.uk

Simple Things
Week-long festival taking place across various Bristol venues. With Giant Swan, Wu-Lu, Gazelle Twin, Flowdan, Fever Ray, Evian Christ, Gilla Band, The Bug Club, and many more. Bristol various venues, 23–29 February, £50–£20, simplethingsfestival.co.uk

International festivals

Artefact Sound Belgium
Concert series with Ghosted (Oren Ambarchi, Johan Berthling and Andreas Werliin), Tashi Wada with Julia Holter, Valentina Magaletti & Theresa Baumgartner, Swans, Kara-Lis Coverdale & Leuvens Alumnikoor, Maria W Horn, NAH, and more. Leuven Stuk, 8–25 February, various times and prices, artefact-festival.be

Deep Wireless Canada
Festival of radio and transmission art lasting several months with exhibitions, sporadic performances, talks, an online compilation and broadcasts. Programme to be announced. Ontario NAISA North Media Arts Centre, on air and online, 11 January–1 April, deepwireless.ca

Elevate Austria
20th anniversary of this interdisciplinary festival of music, arts and political discourse. First acts announced include DJ Krush, Hudson Mohawke, Helena Hauff, Ryoji Ikeda, Colleen and Zoë Mc Pherson. Graz various venues, 28 February–3 March, €99, elevate.at

Norient Switzerland
Film festival for global musical subcultures. Including *Neptune Frost*, Aura Satz's *The Grief Interval*, films on Singeli and Marja Burchard & Embryo. Bern various venues, 10–14 January, norient-festival.com

NYC Winter Jazzfest US
Full spectrum jazz festival marks its 20th time around with a programme featuring Irreversible Entanglements, Matana Roberts, artist-in-residence Shabaka Hutchings, Abiodun Oyewole, Alex Zhang Hungtai, Burnt Sugar The Arkestra, DJ Spooky, Cyro Baptista, Georgia Anne Muldrow, Gilles Peterson, James Brandon Lewis, Kalia Vandever, Laraaji, Luke Stewart, Marc Ribot, Mark Guiliana, Moor Mother, Natural Information Society, Nicole Mitchell, Roy Nathanson's 82 Days, Saul Williams, Steve Gunn, Terri Lyne Carrington, The Jazz Passengers, Tyshawn Sorey, Zoh Amba and The Harvest Time Project. New York various venues, times and prices, 10–18 January, winterjazzfest.com

Out Music: The Future Is Pissed US
A week of creative collaborations between improvising musicians including Tomeka Reid, William Parker, James Brandon Lewis, Ava Mendoza and Val Jeanty. New York City Theater for the New City, 29 January–4 February, various times and prices, artsforart.org

Sonic Acts The Netherlands
International Amsterdam biennale presenting new developments in electronic and digital art that respond to the climate emergency, geopolitics and "the intangible". With Sarah Davachi & Ï Ï, Slikback, Dis Fig, Tarek Atoui, Low End Activist, aircode, and more. Amsterdam various venues, 2 February–24 March, sonicacts.com

Wire supported events

Cafe Oto UK
Events at North East London's venue for experimental music include: Mandhira De Saram/Mark Sanders/Steve Beresford + Loré Lixenberg (4 January), Svartvit + Morgan & Collins (6), The Bohman Brothers + Xylitol (8), Phil Durrant Tentet: Wayne Shorter Tribute (10), Jan St Werner/David Grubbs/Jules Reidy (12–13 January), Olie Brice/Rachel Musson/Mark Sanders (14), Standard Issue play Catherine Lamb and others (15), Works by Morton Feldman (16–17), Charlotte Keefe's Right Here, Right Now Quartet (18), DeForrest Brown Jr (19), Fred Frith & Susana Santos Silva matinee (21, 2pm), Goodiepal (22–23), Manara: Khabat Abas/Pat Thomas/Alya Al-Sultani (28), Mark William Lewis (29), Vito Ricci & Lise Vachon + Loula Yorke (30), Gaëlle Rouard (31), The Cavendish: A Tone Poem with Ain Bailey (4 February), CEL: Felix Kubin & Hubert Zemler (5), Declan Synnott + Rising Damp (7), Enji (11), Venus Ex Machina + Abi Asisa (13), Trevor Watts/John Edwards/Tolef Østvang (14). London Cafe Oto, various times and prices, cafeoto.co.uk

CTM Germany
25th edition of Berlin's international festival of contemporary music and digital art is themed around empathy, solidarity and survival. With Ben Frost, Aïsha Devi, Backxwash, Divide And Dissolve, Anna von Hausswolff, Monolake, Föllakzoid, Elvin Brandhi & DJ Scotch Egg, Gash Collective, and many more. Berlin various venues, 24 January–4 February, ctm-festival.de

Sons d'hiver France
Avant jazz annual with live performances from Otomo Yoshihide New Jazz Quintet, billy woods, Marc Ribot *Words & Music Of Resistance*, Marc Ribot New Trio, Ceramic Dog, Marilyn Mazur solo, James Brandon Lewis project, Trilok Gurtu Quartet, Joëlle Léandre Atlantic Ave Septet, Kahil El'Zabar Ethnic Heritage Ensemble, Eve Risser Red Dessert Orchestra & Kaladjula Band, William Parker Raining On The Moon, Benoit Delbecq 4, Ambrose Akinmusire *Owl Song*, Mulatu Astaké, David Virelles Trio, Rhiannon Giddens, Newen Tahiel, Billie Brelok, Leyla McCalla, and many more. Paris various venues, 19 January–10 February, various times and prices, sonsdhiver.org

Monolake

Kai von Rabenau

Online & hybrid events

Borderline: *The Wire*'s Top 50 Releases Of The Year Germany on air/Online
As is the seasonal tradition, tracks from *The Wire*'s Top 50 Releases Of The Year for 2023 will be broadcast over the Christmas period during three special editions of *Borderline: Musik Für Grenzgänger* show on Germany's Freies Radio Kassel. Online worldwide & Northese 105.8FM and DAB, 15, 22 & 29 December at 7pm, repeated the following day at 11am, free, borderline-extra.de

Celebrating Ryuchi Sakamoto with Sakamoto Tribute Ensemble & DJ Spooky US/Online
Interpretations of music from Sakomoto's debut solo album *Thousand Knives*, Yellow Magic Orchestra and his soundtrack work on what would have been his 72nd birthday. The concert is a fundraiser for the family's foundation, Trees For Sakamoto. New York Roulette, 17 January, 8pm, $55/concert, free/livestream, roulette.org

Getting It Back: The Story Of Cymande UK & Ireland/Online
Tim Macenzie-Smith's documentary about the 1970s UK funk and soul outfit who were heavily sampled by hiphop artists in the 1980s. Online and UK & Ireland cinemas, from 16 February, bfi.org.uk

Special Events

No Fun Presents US
The crew behind No Fun Fest continue their series of one-off events with Keith Fullerton Whitman + Gregg Kowalsky + Religious Knives + Hivemind. Los Angeles 2220 Arts + Archives, 16 February, 8pm, $20, 2220arts.org

Éliane Radigue + Brian Eno Germany
The Dedalus Ensemble perform Eno's ambient music classic *Music For Airports* and one of Radigue's acoustic instrumental works *Occam – Hepta I*. D resden Hellerau, 13 January, 8pm, €17–€8, hellerau.org

Exhibitions & installations

Women In Revolt: Art, Activism And The Women's Movement, UK 1970–1990 UK
Major survey of feminist art by more than 100 women artists in the UK. Cross-media exhibition encompassing punk and independent music, the peace movement, Black and South Asian artists, homophobia and the women's liberation movement. London Tate Britain, until 7 April, £17–£5, tate.org.uk

John Akomfrah: A Space Of Empathy Germany
Free multi-work exhibition by the video artist focusing on colonial pasts, global migration and the climate crisis. Frankfurt Schirn Kunsthalle, until 28 January, free, schirn.de

John Akomfrah: Arcadia UK
New multi-screen video installation exploring colonialism, capitalism and the global implications of climate change. Plymouth The Box, until 2 June, theboxplymouth.com

Tarek Atoui: The Drift France
Artist and electroacoustic composer custom-building complex electronic instruments. Exhibition plus live performances. Villeurbanne Institut D'Art Contemporain, until 28 January, i-ac.eu

Tony Cokes: Doing Politics With Colour US
Cokes's work with appropriated and remixed text, music and documentary images in videos and installations that investigate race, identity, politics and popular culture. New York Dia Bridgehampton, until 30 May, diaart.org

Ryoji Ikeda Finland
Installations made with light, sound and big data from the composer and audiovisual artist. Includes two new works. Helsinki Amos Rex, until 25 February, €18–free, amosrex.fi

Juliannknxx: Chorus In Rememory Of Flight UK
Free multi-screen installation produced by the poet, artist and film maker in collaboration with Black choirs in port cities across Europe. The installation comprises a series of films combining performances, testimonies and contextual material. London Barbican Centre The Curve, until 11 February, 11am–7pm, free, barbican.org.uk

Le Son 7 US
Travelling audio art showcase. The New York iteration includes works by Ann Magnuson, Beatriz Ferreyra, Emeka Ogboh, Francois J Bonnet, Talvin Singh, Little Annie Bandez, Alan Courtis, Matthew Herbert, Kathy Hinde, Bernie Krause, Robin Rimbaud, Stephen Vitiello, Caroline Devine, Abdullah Miniawy, and more. New York 570 Boome Street, 9–14 January, 11am–6pm, free, leson7.com

Meredith Monk: Calling Germany
The composer and vocalist's work presented in the form of multi-sense installations. Plus film screenings. Munich Haus Der Kunst, until 3 March, hausderkunst.de

Meredith Monk: Calling Netherlands
The composer and vocalist's work presented in the form of multi-sense installations in the alcoves of a 700 year old church. Plus concerts. Amsterdam Oude Kerk, until 17 March, hartwigartfoundation.nl

Musical Thinking: New Video Art And Sonic Strategies US
Exhibition focusing on recent video art that speaks to personal and shared aspects of American life. Featuring video art by Raven Chacon, Arthur Jafa, Christine Sun Kim, Cauleen Smith, and more. Washington DC Smithsonian American Art Museum, until 29 January, free, americanart.si.edu

Carsten Nicolai Italy
Recent works by the audiovisual artist and electronic musician also known as Alva Noto. Modena Fondazione Modena Arti Visive, until 11 February, €6–€4, fmav.org

Yoko Ono: Music Of The Mind UK
The largest UK exhibition yet of conceptual artist and activist Yoko Ono's works encompassing film, performance, participatory work, installation, writing, scores and photography spanning six decades. London Tate Modern, 15 February–1 September, £20–£5, tate.org.uk

Velvet Terrorism: Pussy Riot's Russia Canada
Documentation of the musical activist performance group whose target is the repressive nature of the Russian state. Montréal Musée d'art contemporain de Montréal, until 10 March, $10, macm.org

Don Van Vliet (Captain Beefheart) UK
Paintings from the 1980s and 1990s by the former Magic Band leader. London Michael Werner Gallery, until 3 February, Tues–Sat, 10am–6pm, free, michaelwerner.co

La Monte Young & Marian Zazeela: Dream House US
Collaborative sound and light environment created by the drone composer and his light artist partner at their resident New York space. New York MELA Foundation, until 2 June, Wednesday–Saturday, 2pm–midnight, $10, melafoundation.org

UK talks

Where We Come From: Rap, Home & Hope In Modern Britain
Aniefiok Ekpoudom discusses his social history of UK rap and grime. London Purcell Room, 26 January, 7:45pm, £15, southbankcentre.co.uk

UK & Ireland on stage

John Luther Adams: Songbirdsongs
London Philharmonic Orchestra perform these indeterminate miniatures for piccolos and percussion based on free translations of bird songs. London St John's Church Waterloo, 17 January, 6:30pm, £15–£12, lpo.org.uk

African Head Charge
World dub melting pot led by percussionist Bonjo Iyanbinghi Noah and brought to the boil by producer Adrian Sherwood: Leeds Project House (16 February), London Electric Brixton (17) and Tunbridge Wells The Forum (28 March). bandsintown.com

Brìghde Chaimbeul
Scottish smallpipes player: Bristol Strange Brew (21 February), London Round Chapel (22), Chidham Old Malt House (23), Poole The Lighthouse (24) and Basingstoke The Anvil (25). brichaimbeul.com

Manu Delago & Mad About Lemon
Handpan player teams up with vocal ensemble for this tour and the *Snow From Yesterday* album, released by One Little Independent in February: Sheffield Upper Chapel (8), Nottingham Metronome (9), Liverpool Philharmonic Hall (10), Bristol Beacon (11), London Round Chapel (13), Edinburgh Summerhall (14), Glasgow Mono (15), Newcastle upon Tyne Cobalt Studios (16). manudelago.com

Roger Eno + NYX
Brian Eno's brother Roger plays ambient piano from from his latest album *the skies, they shift like chords*. Plus music accompanied by daughter Cecily on vocals,

a string quintet and guitar, and filmic visuals. Experimental choir NYX support with a new work. London Queen Elizabeth Hall, 25 February, 7:30pm, £25–£18, southbankcentre.co.uk

Extra Normal
Sonic adventures in West London with Cos Chapman, Open Union, Wellness Regime and Sunfish Starfish. London Open Ealing, 20 January, 7:30pm, various prices, eventbrite.co.uk

John Francis Flynn
Singer and multi-instrumentalist with modern and experimental takes on traditional Irish folk music. His second album *Look Over The Wall, See The Sky* is out now on Rough Trade offshoot River Lea: Belfast Ulster Sports Club (12 January), Leeds Brudenell Social Club (19), Glasgow Drygate (20), Edinburgh The Caves (21), North Shields The Exchange (23), Manchester Yes (24), Birmingham Hare And Hounds (25), Cardiff Clwb Ifor Bach (26), Bristol The Exchange (27) Leicester The Musician (29), Brighton Concorde 2 (30), London Tufnell Park Dome (31). ents24.com

History's Persistent Voice With Julia Bullock
Singer and Philharmonia Orchestra featured artist Julia Bullock curates this programme with new and recent works by Jessie Montgomery, Cassie Kinoshi, Allison Loggins-Hull and Tania León. London Queen Elizabeth Hall, 2 February, 6pm, £15–£10, southbankcentre.co.uk

Kronos Quartet 50th Anniversary
Birthday concert for the new music ensemble including performances of Steve Reich's *Triple Quartet*, and pieces by Terry Riley, Alfred Schnittke, Peni Candra Rini, George Crumb and Dumisani Maraire. Bristol Beacon, 18 January, 8pm, £38.50–£25, bristolbeacon.org

Lankum
Dublin contemporary folk group who were the subject of Shirley Collins's Epiphanies in *The Wire* 438: Manchester Albert Hall (26 January), Newcastle Upon Tyne Boiler Shop (27), Bristol Beacon (1 February) and Glasgow Barrowland Ballroom (3). lankumdublin.com

London Sinfonietta: New Traditions
The new music group perform George Lewis's *Tales Of The Traveller* for improvisor and notated ensemble; Katherine Balch's *waste not* for soprano and four cassette recorders; and works by Sky Macklay and Michel van der Aa. London Purcell Room, 22 February, 7:45pm, £32–£20, southbankcentre.co.uk

Loudspeaker Orchestra
Ongoing concerts of multi-channel sound art and contemporary music in different venues around London. London St Alfege Church, 21 February, loudspeakerorchestra.org

New Music For Small Ensemble II
Compositions and improvisations for flute, cor anglais, bassoon and guitar by Jerry Wigens and Chlöe Herington. London Conway Hall, 8 February, 7pm, £10, jerrywigens.net

Paraorchestra: Drone Refractions
Orchestral programme focusing on the forebears of minimalist music including John Cage's *Seventy Four*, Pauline Oliveros's *The Last Time/Ultima Vez*, and Arvo Pärt's *Fratres*. Bristol Beacon (25 January) and London Royal Festival Hall The Clore Ballroom (26). paraorchestra.com

Sentient Beings
Improvising quartet of Faith Brackenbury on violin, viola, effects and vocals, drummer Tony Bianco, John Pope on double bass and John O'Gallagher on alto saxophone: Newcastle Globe (28 January), Leeds Hyde Park Book Club (29), Brighton Rose Hill (31), Birmingham Eastside Jazz Club (1 February), Bishop's Castle Town Hall (3), Bristol Fringe (6), London Vortex (8). brackenburybianco.com

Tetine
Alternative sounds from Brazil's underground: London Rich Mix (19 January), London Dash The Henge (17 February) and London The Showroom (23). tetine.net

Teresa Winter + Powders
Leeds based experimental electronic pop composer supported by the Preston based duo who use Playstation soundtracks. Barrow In Furness Piel View House, 24 February, 7pm, £5, eventbrite.co.uk

World Sanguine Report + Matthew Bourne + Seaming To
Dark avant rock songs from Andrew Plummer backed by Will Glaser on drums, Ruth Goller on bass and Matthew Bourne on harmonium. Plus solos from Bourne on harmonium and Seaming To on electronics, voice and clarinet. London New River Studios, 24 February, 8pm, £13–£10, eventbrite.co.uk

Lankum

Incoming

Big Ears US
Adventurous and stylistically diverse weekend in downtown Knoxville, Tennessee with nearly 200 performances including Herbie Hancock, Laurie Anderson, Henry Threadgill, Rhiannon Giddens, Marc Ribot, Digable Planets, Adrianne Lenker, Charles Curtis plays La Monte Young, Shabaka Hutchings, JG Thirlwell, Charles Lloyd, Fred Frith, and King Britt's Blacktronika with Carl Craig, Charlie Dark and Tyondai Braxton. Knoxville various venues, 21–24 March, bigearsfestival.org

Master Musicians Of Joujouka Morocco
An extra edition of this festival which involves a series of intimate concerts and communal meals with the Master Musicians Of Joujouka pipes and drums orchestra. Rif Mountains Joujouka village, 24–26 May, enquire about prices, joujouka.org

Monheim Triennale II: The Prequel Germany
Music festival inviting artists working in different genres to create work together. With Oren Ambarchi, Brìghde Chaimbeul, Peter Evans, Darius Jones, Ganavya Doraiswamy, yuniya eddy kwon, Muqata'a, Rojin Sharafi, Terre Thaemlitz, and more. Monheim am Rheim various venues, 4–6 July, monheim-triennale.de

Rewire Netherlands
Adventurous music and cross-disciplinary performance festival. With Autechre, Annea Lockwood, Goat (jp), The Necks, Oneohtrix Point Never, Gazelle Twin, Amirtha Kidambi's Elder Ones, Iceboy Violet, Phew, Saint Abdullah & Jason Nazary, Laura Ortman and Jenny Hval, and more. The Hague various venues, 4–7 April, €105 early bird, €99 students, rewirefestival.nl

Send listings at least two months in advance to listings@thewire.co.uk. For more events listings go to thewire.co.uk/events, follow @thewiremagazine, and sign up to our weekly newsletter at thewire.co.uk/newsletters

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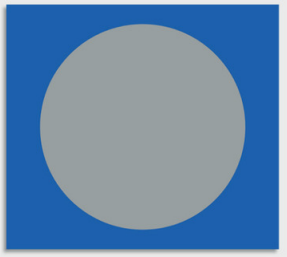

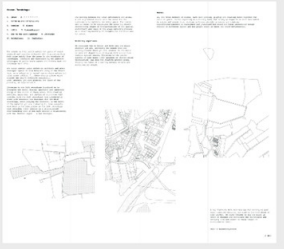

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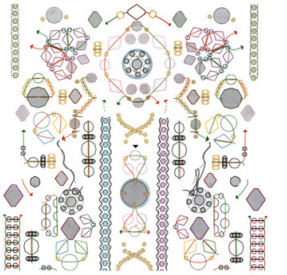

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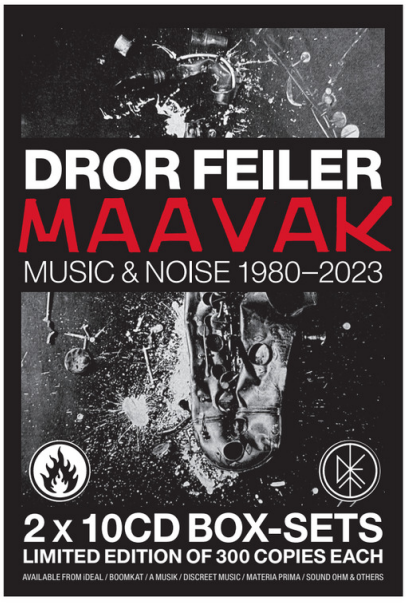

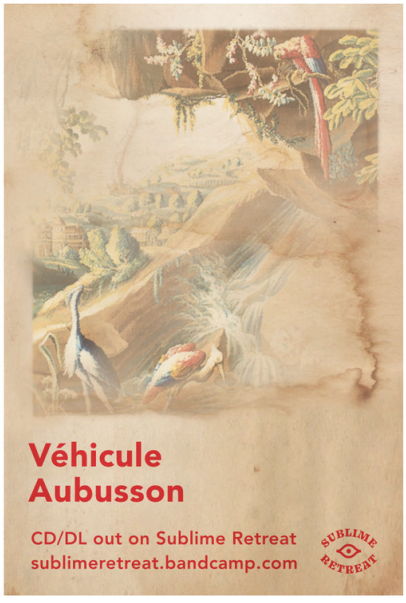

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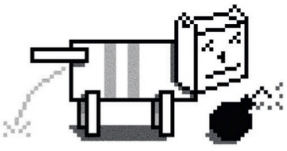

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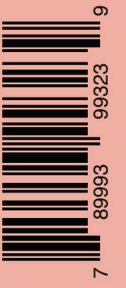

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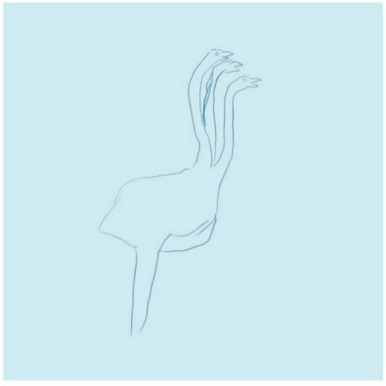

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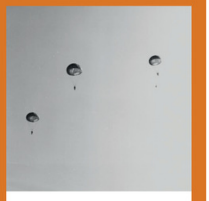

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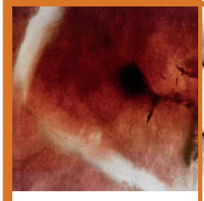

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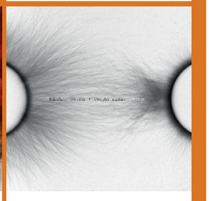

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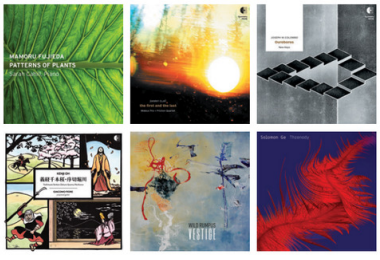

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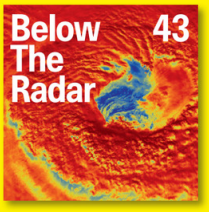

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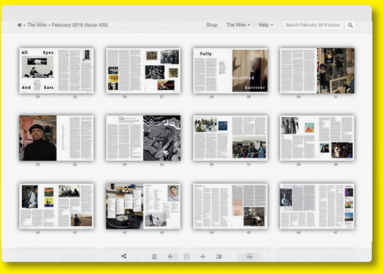

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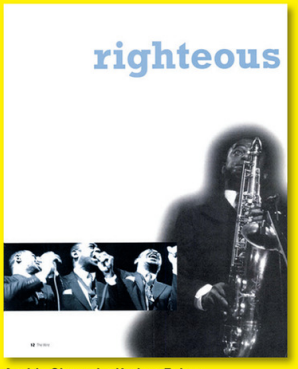

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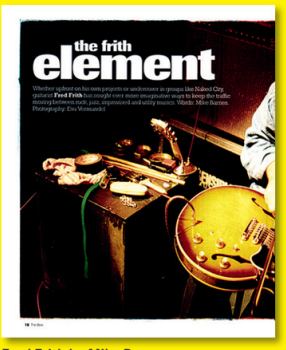

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Dennis Bovell's Invisible Jukebox
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A reference work about Persian music liberates turntablist Mariam Rezaei from the restrictive rules of Western composition

Mariam Rezaei performing *Six Scenes For Turntables And Orchestra*, Darmstadt, 2023

In 2010, I was commissioned by Rhodri Davies, John Tilbury and Michael Duch to write a new piece to premiere at Huddersfield Contemporary Music Festival, alongside works by Ben Patterson, Lene Grenager and Christian Wolff. I was in the middle of my PhD journey, and having already written a number of very trite and corny pieces for turntables that I was very unhappy about, I quibbled between writing for instrumental trio or including myself on turntables as a quartet.

At the time, I was taking instrumental lessons for Iranian santoor and setar, where I was excited by the melodies and the act of bending pitches and retuning strings while learning about dastgah – the standard musical system in Persian classical music. Though I'd listened to many hours of improvised Iranian music at home, learning to play it myself was mindbending. Melodies would ascend in one tuning and descend in another, with these incredible melismatic flourishes. Little symbols across the music score indicated a change, but I didn't know what I could change to or why.

My tutor introduced me to Hormoz Farhat's 1990 book *The Dastgah Concept In Persian Music* (Cambridge University Press). As it turned out, dastgah isn't just a line of notes running up and down the piano keyboard like G major or E minor. There are cadences, intervals, sequential patterns like steps or chromaticism, and different pivots, where you can change key or sustain. There are tuning inflections based on where the dastgah is geographically learned, and particular dastgah are associated with occasions likes celebrations, funerals, instruments or styles of music. These dastgah weren't scales at all, they were melodies leaping off the pages with deep improvisation that took you into different dimensions, rhythms, tonal centres and moods. My mind was blown: we're talking leaning and bending into sexy quarter and three-quarter flats and sharps *all the time*. I was transfixed.

I already had some rough sketches for harp, double bass and piano using dastgah Esfahan, which eventually became the piece "ESFA", premiered by Davies, Tilbury and Duch. But the key part to this work came after the trio premiere, where I sat down and added in the turntable part. In the next few sessions where I played with bending pitches and speeding up records, I made some of the most significant findings that I'm still working on today.

Turntables are made for quarter pitches and glissandi. Why the hell this had not occurred to me sooner is beyond me, but I soon wrote my first quartet for turntables and solo performer. Initially, I used looped sustained double bass and cello notes which just sounded boring! But I was hellbent on this idea as a technique, so I started playing with different sounds. When I tried the same piece with two different sine tones, it sounded like Alvin Lucier on the decks with beatings bouncing between the speakers. Boom! I then expanded this concept into 'surreal turntablism', where I work with samples on turntables to play in a way that the real-life instrument simply could not – for example, sliding voices or organs across several octaves.

The Technics SL-1200/1210 turntables generally have a plus or minus eight percent pitch adjustment over 33 1/3 and 45 rpm, so when playing a looped, sustained pitch, the turntable can achieve six clear tones/ten semitones. In order to bend a little higher or lower than those given pitches, I decided to push and pull the deck manually – that is, with the motor turned off. I remembered how Mix Master Mike once practised the lazer skratch on decks without electricity, resulting in him inventing the phaser skratch, the difference being that with the phaser, the platter slows down at different speeds, producing markedly different pitches and rhythms. This then also means that the turntables will push forward at a different speed and play different pitches too. I took this technique and elaborated on it much more, calling it "Turntables Synths" and using it in pieces like "iCon", and my recent collaboration with Matthew Shlomowitz, "6 Scenes For Turntables & Orchestra", premiered at Internationales Musikinstitut Darmstadt 2023.

I continued to return to Farhat's book to help me consider ideas in harmonic language until I began to challenge myself with a piece called "SADTITZZZ", a 'jazz' work for two turntables. I drew on Farhat's explanations on note functions, harmonic pivots (moteghayyer), and my understanding of two pitches with the function to "stop" (the ist, a stop but not the ending, and the finalis, a final stop/cadence in the music) found in each dastgah.

It gave me a framework that allowed me to expand my compositional ideas with the same sample on two decks, but with the goal for them to work independently and to end differently. In trying to achieve this, I suddenly used every tool in my box and worked through tonal beat juggles (repitching two turntables in combination with rewinding records to repeat a musical phrase), tonal drumming (repitching percussive sounds for a new tuning on one turntable), MIDI button retriggering and repitching samples with smaller loops to form sustained pitches, all done live and explicitly in front of the audience, in combination with switching the turntable motors on and off. It's become a bit of a bible for me, and who knows where it will take me next? ●

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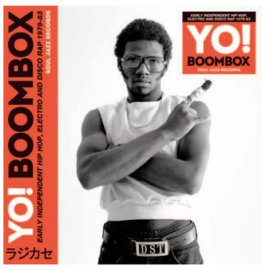

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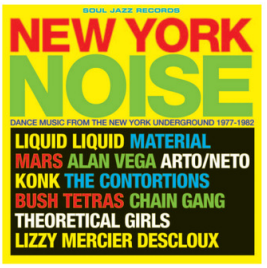

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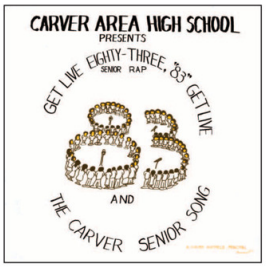

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